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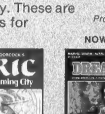

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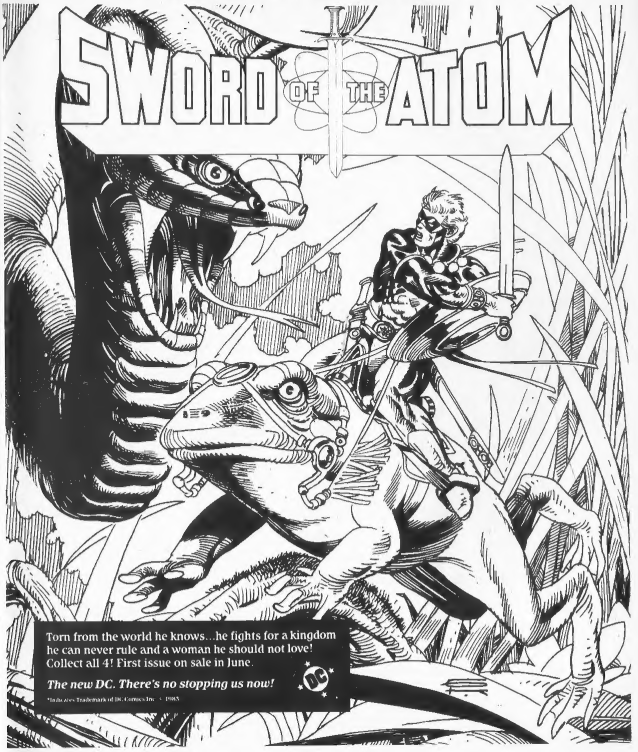

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ISSUE #10
JULY

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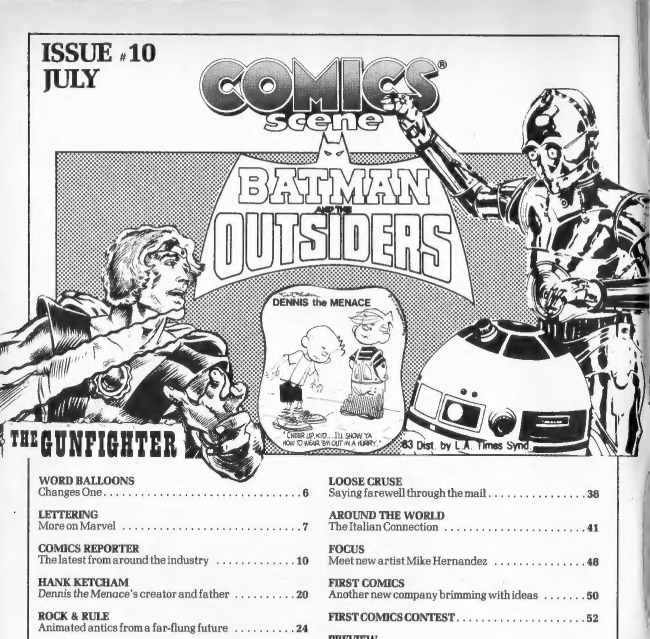

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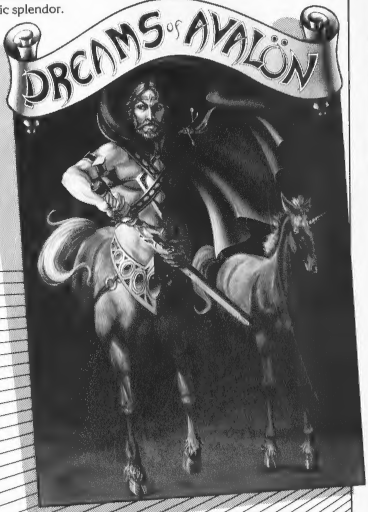

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ABOUT THE COVER: Batman bursts forward in a brand new comic, alongside some new and familiar heroes in *The Outsiders*. Our pictorial preview begins on page 56 with loads of Jim Aparo artwork, including the cover graphic which was colored by Tony Tollin. Darth Vader is ready to try and prevent the *Return of the Jedi* on May 25th. On page 32, Al Williamson discusses adapting the movies into comic books and the rest of his "illustrious career." Then there's Mok, the villainous musician in *Rock and Rule*. He's really nasty and wants to destroy the world—will he? Turn to page 24 for a preview. BATMAN AND THE OUTSIDERS ARE ® & © 1983 DC COMICS INC., USED WITH PERMISSION: DARTH VADER © 1983 LUCASFILM LTD.; ROCK AND RULE © MGM/UA ENTERTAINMENT.

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Word Balloons

Changes-One

COMICS SCENE has been growing and maturing for more than a year-and-a-half. We here at the office think the magazine has finally found a place for itself in fandom. Looking over the last nine issues, I take a great deal of pride in how we have improved, considering the constant pressures of scheduling, last-minute news, late ads and the usual looniness you've all heard about before. But, now, comes the time for a somewhat major change in COMICS SCENE's identity.

Beginning next issue, Loose Cruse will no longer be a regular column in this magazine. Howard Cruse dropped by the office in January to explain that the hours he spent on each column were becoming more of a drain on his time as a freelance artist. He also felt a bit exhausted after 10 columns, having discovered it was easier to comment through art-work rather than a few typewritten words. But this decision doesn't mean Howard will be gone entirely, though. Whenever the muse strikes him, Loose Cruse will return. Thanks, Howard, for 10 solid columns and an entirely different and engaging point of view.

Next issue, Martin Pasko will become our new columnist. Marty and I have known each other for many years, and I've watched his work appear everywhere: fanzines, DC, Marvel, First Comics, Saturday morning TV, comic strips, prime time TV. If that doesn't qualify him to take a close look at the industry, then I give up. Seriously, Marty's Guest Spot in COMICS SCENE #6 demonstrated his understanding of the comics industry and its future. Marty is never afraid to criticize where necessary. I look forward to his column and hope you do, too.

Next issue: meet our new managing editor—once we hire someone.

* * *

In this issue, Jan Strnad advocates the use of ratings, rather than the Comics Code, to protect the industry from self-righteous, self-interested organizations. While it is true that sooner or later, someone may discover that comics have changed drastically in the last 20 years, imposing arbitrary ratings like the ones used for movies won't do any of us any good.

Instead, if you disapprove of a comic on moral grounds, tell the publisher. Tell your friends how you feel and never buy the title again. Don't start boycotts or letter-writing campaigns to have the writer and artist committed to The Phantom Zone or even The Twilight Zone. Just because it offended you doesn't mean your next-door neighbor won't get a kick out of it.

Tolerance is just another aspect of the independent press movement and the direct-sales market. There are distributors who find certain titles offensive and won't carry them in their stores, but do let other direct market dealers make the decision for themselves. Please extend that courtesy to your fellow readers and creators. We are all in this for *entertainment*.

Jan, Howard and I would very much like to hear your views on this subject.

Bob

—Robert Greenberger

Lettering

Steady as She Goes

The mail is coming in at a good clip and for that, we thank you. There are a few controversies brewing around here and no doubt more to come. If you want to add your 2¢ in any subject under the sun, address your letter to:

Lettering
COMICS SCENE
475 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10016

On Issue #8

In review:

. . .COMPLAINT—Dave & Deni Sim interview: I know this isn't very important and not many people care, but, the term is sealing wax, not ceiling wax. Whoever heard of ceiling wax?

COMPLAINT—Spider-Man Contest: The spiders and webs were too easy to find. C'mon guys!

COMPLAINT—To Some Readers: Stop picking on Brian Pearce!! His cartoons are not bad, they are the most unique and recognizable since Fred Hembeck's and I like them.

COMPLAINT—To Howard Zimmerman: I disagree with you about *Marvel Fanfare* #7. I didn't think it was a big disappointment. In fact, I was surprised at how good it was.

COMPLIMENTS—The rest of the mag!! Even the ads!

Cayce Lancaster
92 Van Dorn
Grenada, MI 38901

If you thought the Spider-Man contest was too easy, let's see how you do with the First Comics contest on page 61.

Dear COMICS SCENE,

. . .I warn you beforehand, this letter is not a good news letter. First off all, stick to relevancy, things that we all know or care about today. Lately, I feel you're dishing out too much cartoon stuff like Crusader Rabbit, Japanese filmmakers and others that few of your readers know anything about.

Also, make your interviews mainly comics related. In the next issue column,there was absolutely nothing listed to make me want to buy your book and if I don't read a majority of it, why buy it?

I am aware of Howard Zimmerman setting off Marvel in an angered frenzy and causing them to publish their own news hotline. So what?

Being mostly a Marvel fan, I'd love to know more about the new DC.

David Levy
RD #3-1140 Laurence Ave.
Toms River, NJ 08757

Marvel Age *was in the planning stages long before Marvel got "fed" up with the press but we get your point. As for the new DC, check out the preview of two new titles, beginning on* page 52.

SO YOU THINK RUNNING A COMIC BOOK ON IT'S SIDE IS PRETTY EASY, HUH? YEA... SURE, YOU BET!
ALRIGHT PEOPLE...
EVERYTIME ONE OF YOU JOKERS PULLS THE COMIC UPRIGHT - CRASH!! THERE GOES MY BOOK. WE LOST 33 IN THE LAST 2 ISSUES ALONE. SIGH!
BUT I'LL SHOW YOU! I'LL DO A BACKWARDS ISH! (HEE HEE! HEE!)
COMICS © 1983 DAVE SIM

Dear Editor,

. . .Publish CS once or twice a month. Give more news on what's happening in the comics world. Lengthen your letters section to five pages. Get rid of Crusader Rabbit, Elfquest and Cerebus. Review some of the new comics, write more about DC and Marvel rather than the other companies. Do three interviews rather than one or two. Get more people like Cruse, who give us interesting information. How about a pocket-checklist of EVERY comic being distributed every month? I like your editorial, expand it to two pages.

Tom Mascaro
Address withheld by request

Frankly Tom, if we did all of what you have asked, we'd be dead from coronaries within a month. Actually, our sales do not yet warrant any change in frequency at the moment. There are other, more frequent publications that can give you the checklists you ask for, including The Comics Buyer's Guide, *Amazing Heroes* and The Comic Reader. *The subject of reviews has been debated here before. The final conclusion has come down to the timing—there's no way we can review comics far enough in advance to make the reviews worthwhile to the readers. Each issue, on the other hand, we try to do as many interviews as possible. This issue we have four: Al Williamson, Michael Hirsh of Nelvana, Hank Ketcham and the crew at First Comics.*

Creative Teams

Dear Bob:

. . .Marv Wolfman's Guest Spot editorial (COMICS SCENE #8) really starts off on the wrong foot: comic books are not a collaborative medium like television or movies—where one *has* to work with others. Indeed, if you look at the better, the most successful comic books published over the past 45 years, you will find a credible percentage of them to be performed by one writer/penciller.

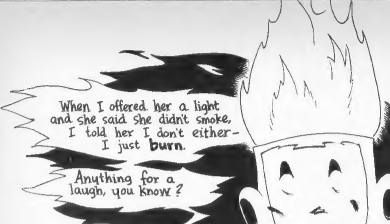
Marv restricts his argument to writers and artists, and he restricts his examples to writers and pencillers; I shall do the same. Marv overlooks the massive contributions from most of the medium's true geniuses, all of whom are, at the very least, writer/pencillers: Will Eisner, Carl Barks, Walt Kelly, Jack Cole, Jim Steranko, Frank Miller, John Byrne—I'll avoid emphasizing Mike Grell and Howard Chaykin, both of whom work with First Comics.

Ignoring the self-indulgent aspect of your argument, Marv, let me state categorically that your examples of "perfect partnerships" are first-rate, but they ignore the individual writer/pencillers working in the medium. Frank Miller's *Daredevil* was far superior to the McKenzie/Miller *Daredevil*. Jim Steranko's *S.H.I.E.L.D.* was far superior to the Lee/Steranko *S.H.I.E.L.D.*, Neal Adams' Spectre was far superior to the Fox/Adams Spectre, and, for that matter, John Byrne's *Fantastic Four* is far superior to the Wolfman/Byrne *Fantastic Four*.

There's an unfortunate reality associated with this analysis: there are a lot of first-class artists who later become first-class writers as well—the reverse is rarely, if ever, true.

When singing the praises of the art form, Marv does a great injustice by overlooking the contributions of the one person writer/artist.

Mike Gold
Managing Editor
First Comics, Inc.


When I offered her a light and she said she didn't smoke, I told her I don't either— I just burn.
Anything for a laugh, you know?
FIRESTORM ® & © 1983 DC COMICS INC.
BURNES

Are Superheroes Graphic?

Dear COMICS SCENE,

. . . I believe that the Marvel Graphic Novel series is a good idea. Powerful and moving stories with sophisticated art are now presented in an uncensored form. But the appearance of superheroes disturbs me.

I enjoyed *The Death of Captain Marvel* and *The New Mutants* but I think these stories should have appeared elsewhere. *Marvel Super Special* perhaps. Four-color comics are the home of superheroes and I believe that superheroes should stay there. The graphic novel series should do things a bit differently.

The graphic novels should present themes and stories that are not usually explored in regular comics. I think that stories like those found in prose novels or movies should be and can be done. I am not asking for adaptation of these stories.

We need new and different ideas to show the public at large that comics are more than "kid stuff." I think that the Marvel Graphic Novel series has an opportunity to do this.

Edward Jackson
706 North Seventh Street
Maywood, IL 60153

Musical Questions

Dear Editor,

. . . I have a couple of questions for you and I hope you have the answers. First, in your May issue, you did an article on the Don Bluth movie *The Secret of NIMH*, and I have seen the movie. My question is—where can I get the record of the movie soundtrack? I know that the record is put out by a record company by the name of Soundstream or Soundesign but I haven't been able to obtain the record ANYWHERE in my area. Can you possibly tell me whether or not the record is in circulation or not? Second, in your March issue, your article on Bil Keane's *Family Circus* was a very fine piece except for one thing—the photos(at copy you used for page 41 was fuzzy (or should I say double-exposed?) My question is this—is this problem (fuzzy illustrations) an ongoing thing or is it something that crops up every once in a while? Keep up the good work!

Darren R. Ryder
RD 1 Box 137
Chaumont, NY 13622

Vanese Saraband Records has finally released the NIMH soundtrack. As for fuzzy photos, they crop up occasionally but we work with our printers to try and avoid this problem as often as possible.

Spidey Raves

Dear Editor,

. . . There was a day when Spider-Man was so realistic, you empathized with him. In fact, you felt with him. I really feel that the book has had that quality restored. The continuity and the artwork are once again what makes Spider-Man Marvel's number one comic, to me, anyway. I've grown from a child to a young adult with Peter Parker and thanks to you, Tom DeFalco, and COMICS SCENE for your most informative and interesting article.

Jim Raskell
E. 2908 17th St.
Spokane, WA 99203

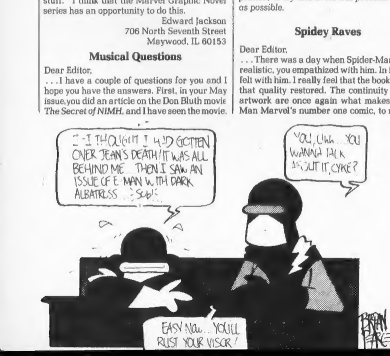
Dear People—

. . . Issue no. 8 was very good. Tho Dave and Don Sim interview was particularly informative. But there is just one little itty-bitty thing i think one of your writers got wrong in no. 8—that's where Patrick Daniel O'Neill said that John Romita, not Steve Ditko, is the artist most associated with the character of Spider-Man in the minds of fans. Perhaps to a reader who picks up a copy now and then and buys toys and games with Spider-Man clip-art on them, Romita is the artist of note—god knows he has prostituted the character endlessly for the benefit of hairbrush manufacturers and puzzle companies. This is not to speak ill of Romita's talent; it's just that when i think of Spider-Man decals, I always think of Romita. On the other hand, when i think of *Spider-Man*, alias Peter Parker, i think of Sturdy Steve and none other. He brought the idea to life—some say he imbued it with facets of his own life—and it was he who plotted and drew the definitive version of the book, by which all others are judged.

You may think that i write this from personal nostalgic loyalty, but i have an idea you would not be so ready to call Romita "the" Spider-Man artist if you had been following Keno Don Rosa's "Comics Hall of Fame" series in the *Comic Reader*. Rosa invites people to simply submit lists of their favorite comic book issues (not entire runs, but single issues or multi-issue story-lines). The responses cover a wide range of genres, of course, with super-heroes being only one of the categories in which titles and issues are nominated. However, among those who list super-hero books, *Spider-Man* is frequently nominated. I have kept a running informal check on "most often nominated Marvel Comics" and, to cut off the top of my head, I would say that the top ones right now are early *Avengers* (no. 4, with the return of Captain America named often), early Fantastic Four (no. 4 with the return of the Sub-Mariner, no. 40, in which Ben Grimm almost kills Doctor Doom, and the first Galactus/Silver Surfer series are the top nominees, with no. 40 heading by a wide margin), and early *Spider-Man* issues. Of the various early (Ditko) Spideys nominated, the one which comes up most often is no. 33, which in the last installment of Rosa's column, was nominated around four times. This is the issue in which, as one person put it, "Spidey lifts the ten-ton dashiekey and saves Aunt May." It may be THE single most-nominated story in the time Rosa has been running this feature, possibly tying with *Uncle Scrooge* no. 6 ("Tres-Le-La"), which is also nominated more than once every time.

I myself took an informal poll on the subject—every fan or pro i talked to today was asked to "name the artist you think of first when i say the name of this comic book . . . *Spider-Man*." Of the eight people i asked, two said, "Romita," and six said, "Steve Ditko." One was even reading a Steve Ditko *Spider-Man* comic at the moment i phoned him! Ages of my test subjects ranged from 11 to 40, by the way.

Catherine Yronwode
105 Austin Ave.
Columbia, MO 65201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DC

Ernie Colon Leaves Staff; 4 Titles Scragged

A year-long storyline begins in *The Flash* this May when the *Speedster* is seen murdering the Reverse-Flash

On April 1, Ernie Colon left his editorial position at DC to take on freelance illustrating and editing for the company. "The reason is very simple," Colon told COMICS SCENE. "They kept giving me projects that I wanted to do and it became too many for me to continue my editorial workload."

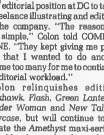
Colon relinquishes editing *Blackhawk*, *Flash*, *Green Lantern*, *Wonder Woman* and *New Talent Showcase*, but will continue to illustrate the *Amethyst* maxi-series. He adds that sales have been stronger than expected on *Amethyst* and a major licensing deal is in the works.

Colon will also produce a graphic novel for DC, based on a science-fiction novel he wrote some time ago. The 64-page story will be adapted from the original prose.

Karen Berger will become a full editor, leaving behind her Editorial Coordinator duties, picking up *New Talent Showcase* and *Saga of Swamp Thing*, in addition to *Amethyst* and *Legion of Super-Heroes*. Also, Alan Gold has been hired to edit *Blue Devil* and act as assistant editor to freelance editor Marv Wolfman's titles, *Omega Men*, *Night Force*, *Vigilante* and *Star Trek*. No editor has been assigned to the books left by Colon.

Colon will edit, at home, a six issue *Creeper* mini-series plotted and pencilled by Keith Giffen. "Keith really doesn't need an editor," Colon says. "He just needs a sounding board for his ideas."

In summing up his year-long tenure at DC, Colon says, "It was the best year of my professional life. Jenette Kahn opened up a door that I never knew existed and it had the best impact on my life."



Ernie Colon at a February convention.

IN OTHER NEWS: DC has announced the cancellation of four titles—the long-running *House of Mystery* with #321, *Captain Carrot with #20*, *Night Force* with #14 and *Adventure Comics Digest* with #503. *CC* and *NF* may return in the future with tentative plans calling for annual mini-series. . . The Dan McGregor-Gene Colan *Nathaniel Dusk* mini-series has been slated for an autumn direct-only Baxter release. . . DC is beginning a new series of reprints. Now that their reprint rate has increased dramatically, the line will benefit all concerned. Green Lantern/Green Arrow will kick off the series by collecting the classic tales by Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams that originally ran in *GL* 76-87, 89. The 64-page issues will use a new type of paper stock guaranteed to last 400 years. The first non-returnable, $2 issue goes on sale in July. . . Supergirl will receive a new costume with issue #13 this August. DC will not confirm if it reflects changes in the feature film now in production. . . Thriller is a non-returnable monthly series created by Robert Loren Fleming, illustrated by Trevor VonEeden. DC describes it as one of the most exciting concepts published in years. Look for it to premiere in August.

MARVEL COMICS

New Masthead Notes and News

Beginning with its October cover-dated editions, Marvel Comics will sport new mastheads which will add a slightly more uniform look to the entire line. Designed by Joe Abello, the new masts fill the upper left corner of the covers, eliminating the banner atop the logos. This, according to Carol Kalish, will give artists another ¾" for artwork since the logos will move up a corresponding degree.

There will be a different masthead for the direct-only comics, using the stylized "M" and dropping the Comics Code seal of approval. The Epic Comics will also feature the stylized logo, adding the word "Marvel" atop the ID graphic, thus tyng the Epic line more solidly into the Marvel line.

These are samples of the new mast headings by Joe Abello, in an effort to make the Marvel line more uniform and less cluttered.

IN OTHER NEWS: Ron Frenz has assumed the pencilling chores on *Crystar*. This latest gig now gives him three monthly assignments, including both *Marvel Team-Up* and *Star Wars*. Frenz will work fairly closely with scripter Mary Jo Duffy on both *Crystar* and *Star Wars*, now that the Lucasfilm title has been assigned to her permanently. Bret Blevins was forced to give up *Crystar* after only a few issues to illustrate the adaptation of Columbia's fantasy film *Krull*, due out in July. Blevins will then turn to a *Hulk* graphic novel and several other projects. . . The *Moon Knight* reprint series has been finalized as three monthly 48-page, $2 Baxter editions beginning in July. Walt Simonson will do the covers for the two *Avengers* reprint books which began in May. He also pencilled the seven-page recap in the first issue, setting up the events republished from issues #65-92. Tom Palmer will ink the covers and introduction. . . Marvel Universe has been expanded from 12 to 14 issues. Issue #13 will be The Book of the Dead—featuring deceased characters—while issue 14 concentrates on weaponry from Thor's Hammer, Mjolnir, to the machinery of AIM. . . Speaking of weapons, we're promised the very *last* Cosmic Cube tale ever in a forthcoming issue of *Captain America*. . . The long-planned Falcon limited series will premiere in July. The series was intended as a training ground for new talents and has been scripted by Jim Owsley, Larry Hama's assistant editor. Two of the four issues were pencilled by Paul Smith and Mark Bright; Vince Colletta inks the series. . . October cover-dated books will be supervised by Marvel's line of assistant editors: Linda Grant, Michael Carlin, Ann Nocenti, Owsley, Bob Harras, Mike Higgins, Eliot Brown, Danny Fingeroth. Assistant Editors' month will feature the stories that these eight have always wanted to do but they will be carefully supervised by the full editors. More details to come. . . Josef Rubinstein will ink Butch Guice's pencils when the *X-Men/Micronauts* four-issue limited series gets underway later this year. . . Walt Simonson hopes to have the time to script, pencil and ink Thor, beginning with issue #337. At least two issues will be done in this manner and if satisfied, Simonson says he'll keep it going.

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IN MEMORIAM

Tintin Creator Dead at 75

Georges Remi, 75, who, under the pen name Herge, created *Tintin*, died in his native Brussels on March 3. A hospital spokesman said Remi, admitted a week earlier for treatment of leukemia, died of heart failure.

Twenty-three comic books featuring the adventures of the intrepid boy reporter and his faithful dog Milou (Snowy in the English versions) have sold more than 50 million copies worldwide in 32 languages, including Chinese, Arabic, and Icelandic. Remi's work received wide acclaim and critical honors during his career. The late French President, General Charles deGaulle, once confided to an aide, "My only international rival is Tintin."

Born in Brussels on May 22, 1907, Remi started his cartooning career with *Totor of the June Bug Patrol* for a Belgian Boy Scout newspaper in 1926. The man who was to become the most popular cartoonist in Europe had no formal art training. "Herge" adopted a pen name which was taken from the French pronunciation of his inverted initials, because he was embarrassed at the quality of his drawing.

Tintin was created in 1929 for the weekly supplement of *Le Vingtiem Siecle*, a Belgian daily newspaper. The first book-length collection, *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*, appeared in 1930. Throughout the years, the perenially 16-year-old adventurer would meet the characters who would become regulars in the series, including Professor Calculus, the hot-tempered Captain Haddock, and the hapless detectives Thompson and Thompson.

Tintin and his friends travelled to the Middle East, Tibet, the Congo, the United States, and even the Moon. However, Remi himself rarely ventured beyond his native Belgium. "Herge created the exotic lands that Tintin visited through research and imagination. He had never been a traveler himself," according to Alain Baron, one of Remi's assistants.

Remi and his collaborators over the years have come to be known as the "Brussels School" of cartooning, spearheading the post-World War II renaissance of European comic art. Rene Goscinny and Marcel Uderzo, creators of Asterix the Gaul, started their careers working for the weekly *Tintin* magazine.

"There's an element of protest in *Tintin* which I wasn't at all aware of when I started," Remi once said. "Tintin is an adolescent fighting the adult establishment: gun-runners, politicians, drugs. The person I should have liked to have been. He bens.

"His dog, Milou, is the Sancho Panza to his Don Quixote. More prosaic, he brings him back down to earth."

American fans may remember a series of animated serials featuring Tintin and company which ran in syndication for nearly a decade. Little Brown and Co. published several English translations of Tintin's escapades including titles such as *The Crab with the Golden Claws*, *Destination Moon*, *The Broken Ear*, *The Calculus Affair*, *Seo Sharks* and *Cigars of the Pharoah*.

Due to the tone of some of Tintin's adventures, Remi had been called anti-Communist, anti-American, and a colonialist, but he dismissed all such charges: "For years, the left has said I'm right, and the right has said I'm left. I don't like to contradict either."

—John Sayers

IN MEMORIAM

Roy G. Krenkel 1918-1983

In February, Roy G. Krenkel, one of the most influential fantasy artists of the century, died after a lingering bout with cancer. Brooklyn's Greenwood Cemetary was the site of a funeral attended by some of the biggest names in comics and science fiction circles.

Krenkel's vivid imagination has been captured in both books and comics. He is cited by Frank Frazetta, Al Williamson and Angelo Torres as one of the most important influences in their lives. His artwork has only recently been rediscovered by fans. *Swordsmen & Sorcerians*, a collection of illustrations of his dinosaurs and duellists, will be released by George Scithers' Owlswick Press later this year. (As a special tribute to Krenkel, it is previewed in STARLOG #72).

Born on July 11, 1918, Krenkel was always fascinated by fine arts and the work being done for books, magazines and comic strips. Newman Lindsay, J.C. Cell and Franklin Booth were among the many influences on his artistic style. George Bridgeman taught Krenkel at the Art Student's League until Krenkel was drafted in World War II.

After his discharge, Krenkel attended the Cartoonists and Illustrators' School and his work was further influenced by Burne Hogarth (COMICS SCENE #5), who taught there in addition to drawing the Sunday *Tarzan* page. At this time, he met Williamson, Frazetta, Torres, Ross Andru and numerous other young artists. In addition to woking his own stories, he collaborated with several others for E.C. and other publishers.

Krenkel stretched himself by executing interior illustrations and cover paintings for various books including a series of Edgar Rice Burroughs editions published by Ace Books in the 1960s. He also contributed to some of the field's most noteworthy fanzines including *Amra*, *Infinity*, and *Comics Fandom Monthly*.

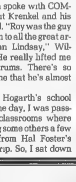
Throughout his distinguished career, Krenkel received numerous awards including a Hugo, in the early 1960s, as best artist of the year. Just last October, he was presented the Chairman's Life Award at the World Fantasy Convention.

Al Williamson spoke with COMICS SCENE about Krenkel and his effect on the field. "Roy was the guy who turned me on to all the great artists like Norman Lindsay," Williamson says. "He really lifted me out of my doldrums. There's so much of Roy in me that he's almost like my father.

"We met at Hogarth's school back in 1948. One day, I was passing one of the classrooms where Roy was showing some others a few original pages from Hal Foster's *Tarzan* comic strip. So, I sat down next to him. Roy was explaining how Foster may have arrived at this or that. I asked him if he had any of Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon* work and he said yes. I thought, 'My god, this kid is a collector and he has all this wonderful stuff.'

"Every time I went to see him for those 35 years, it was 'Oh boy, I'm going to see Roy!' It was always like the first time. He was just so alive. I learned a great deal from working with him. He was a very strong influence, and not only artwise, he affected my way of thinking. He clarified so many things for me by just being with him. He was one of those human beings who just naturally made others thunk. He also inspired people to create better work, —not by saying so, but he made you *want* to do better work because he loved art so much.

"To me, Roy Krenkel will *always* be alive because he was just so full of life. He effected me in such a positive, wonderful way. I'm thankful that in the last year of his life, he was taken care of and happy. I'm going to miss him very, very much."



IN MEMORIAM

Rick Fletcher

Rick Fletcher, the artist who helped usher *Dick Tracy* into his 50th year, died of cancer on March 16 in Woodstock, Illinois. He was 66.

Fletcher, who had also drawn a Sunday page strip, *The Old Glory Story*, took over *Tracy* from creator Chester Gould in 1961, working as his assistant. Upon Gould's retirement, the Chicago Tribune—New York Daily News Syndicate selected Fletcher to continue the adventures of the square-jawed comic detective, in collaboration with mystery novelist Max Allan Collins. (COMICS SCENE #3, 6). Together, the two revitalized the strip, returning it to its more-realistic criminal milieu where it enjoyed its initial success in the '30s.

Fletcher had told Collins on March 14 that he was too ill to continue working on the strip and would be entering a hospital immediately. At the time of his death, two days later, Fletcher had almost completed illustrating the current yearning *Dick Tracy* storyline, the strip's "first ghost story" in its history. Since the two worked some 16 weeks in advance of publication, there was no immediate need to select a successor. A new artist will be chosen for the feature soon.

Rick Fletcher is survived by his wife of 36 years, Beverly, and two children.

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DC COMICS

New Atari Force Comics On Its Way

The new Atari Force, plus their major adversary on the far left, as depicted Jose-Luis Garcia Lopez.

ART: © 1984 DC COMICS

For those who like their video games with word balloons, DC Comics will be launching a new *Atari Force* comic next fall.

According to Gerry Conway, the writer on the project, these will not be featuring the *Atari Force* characters from the "in-pack comics" that have recently been inserted in selected Atari video cartridges. Instead, they will be featuring new characters created by Conway, artist Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez and editor Andrew Helfer.

"The attention of the original *Atari Force*," explains Conway, "was sort of a high-tech, *Star Trek*-ian group of people, who were primarily human beings without super powers, exploring different worlds based on the game cartridges. The new premise is to have characters who are inherently interesting aliens and humans, as well as other strange-powered creatures.

"The universe of our new *Atari Force* is still the Atari universe," Conway continues, "so they will be able to encounter elements from the games in the storyline, just as they do in the in-pack books. Yet, they are primarily intended to be a wide-ranging, open-adventure, character-oriented series."

The new *Atari Force* is scheduled to be introduced with either the fifth or the sixth in-pack book, coming out in spring 1983 (The Vanguard cartridge). Because the release of the games are often subject to changes, the storylines are not expected to cross-over from the in-pack books to the general sale comics.

Unlike the in-pack books, which basically revolved around the Atari space games, Conway feels that the DC series will give him more leeway for creativity. "There will be a lot of latitude with the new books, because we won't try to even suggest game play," he says. "When we first started the in-pack books, we thought that we would be doing them for elements the entire Atari line, which is why we had made the characters kind of bland. We wanted to be able to put them into any given situation."

"I would have liked to have seen an *Atari Force* book set in *Pac Man's* world, or one in the *Break Out* world," continues Conway. "That would have forced creativity into the series, by dealing with these bizarre situations. As it stands now, it's basically space shoot-em-ups, which I think is a misuse of the series' potential. I expect the new *Atari Force* to be far more colorful. The primary thrust of the stories will now be the characters, rather than the situations that they are getting themselves into."

The new characters are not actually based on the Atari games, although there is one named Tempest. Conway explains, "We came up with the name so that we would have some correlation, but also because we liked it as a name."

Whether these changes will be enough to attract the fans will ultimately depend on Conway's and Lopez's abilities to turn out a book which is truly fantastic-interesting than just a game spin-off.

—Jean-Marc & Randy Lofficier

MEDIA

George Romero and Jim Shooter Create a Superhero

George Romero, director of *Creepshow* and *Night of the Living Dead*, and Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter have joined forces to create a new superhero who will be seen in both film and comics. Long interested in adapting a comics character into film, Romero has, at one point or another, contemplated picking up rights to several heroes including Popeye. Brought together with Marvel, Romero asked which secondary superhero would be a good candidate for the movies. "George was interested in creating a new world for the character," Shooter explained. The director wanted to avoid top-of-the-line Marvel creations with already well-established backgrounds.

"I suggested Power Man, Machine Men . . . six in all. I finally asked him, 'Why don't we just create a new one?' We went to have lunch and came back with a movie." Shooter has been deeply involved in developing the screen treatment for Romero's Laurel Entertainment production company. Six Marvel artists are creating visuals for a full-scale presentation. An announcement ad for *Variety* was drawn by Bill Sienkiewicz.

According to an article in *The New York Times*, Laurel is extremely interested in the merchandising angle, the making of a superhero into a household commodity. "First, we tried to buy an existing superhero but the good ones were already bought or too expensive. The asking price was $1 million," said producer Richard Rubinstein, Romero's partner.

The project remains under development. Although Romero was in the process of writing the screenplay at presstime, no schedules have been announced for either the film or the comic. Most likely, according to Marvel, the comic series will premiere first.

Romero said, "My film script will be a typical introduction of a superhero—he comes into his powers—and will take him through his first series of adventures." The character has been described as a sheriff in futuristic Philadelphia who battles an adversary skilled in robotics.

OTHER MEDIA NOTES INCLUDE: *RED SONJA* goes into production shortly according to Mimi Shapiro, vice president of Conan/Summit Licensing. Doug Moench's storyline has been approved by executive producer Dino DeLaurentis. Moench traveled to California in March to begin scripting. Ralph Bakshi will make his live-action directorial debut on the project . . . *CONAN, KING OF THIEVES* has run into a snag. After a script by Roy Thomas and Gerry Conway was approved by DeLaurentis, Barry Windsor-Smith returned to the barbarian to storyboard the project. Roger Donaldson (*Smash Palace*) was signed to direct. However, in early March, Donaldson left the savage Cimmerian to helm another long-dry-docked DeLaurentis project, the remake of *Mutiny on the Bounty*. Casino, with only Arnold Schwarzenegger back from the first film's cast, begins shooting in Mexico this summer, barring the actors' strike . . . *SUPERGIRL* will star 18-year-old Helen Slater and Faye Dunaway. At one time, the script by David Odell was being altered to entice Dolly Parton to join the film as a witch. She wanted the same deal as Richard Pryor in *Superman III*—an evil character with a streak of good. Production began in April at England's Pinewood Studios for a planned 1984 release . . . *THE BATMAN* screenplay, penned by Tom Mankiewicz, was scheduled to be turned in April 15th. As revealed in STARLOG #70, the storyline involves The Joker (with Peter O'Toole and Jack Nicholson mentioned for the role) and Batman's origin, emphasizing the "creature of the night" approach to the character. The Penguin, included in an earlier script draft, has been dropped from the film—even though Dudley Moore had expressed interest in the part. One final revelation: Batman's love interest will be a familiar character from the comics . . . *CAPTAIN AMERICA*, the Broadway musical which has been in the works for over two years, has been assigned to Bill Gray as director Marvel Entertainment is co-producing with Mike Merrick. The musical, styled after *Man of La Mancha*, takes a look at Cap in middle age . . . *MANIMAL* is a new superhero from Glen (Battlestar Galactica) Larson. The TV pilot stars Simon MacCorkindale (*Sword and the Sorcerer*) as a man who can turn into a panther at night. He uses that fantastic ability to fight crime, a were-panther. Where? At NBC. Meanwhile, at ABC, Larson has sold his Automan pilot. This time, our hero is a computer operator who develops a computer-generated superhero to fight crime—only at night, sorta like *Manimal* . . . *HEAVY METAL II* will be a 3-D animated production, using a new process developed in South Korea according to HM Publisher Lan Mogel. The film has a true foreign feel, emphasizing French-licensed material and entirely animated in Korea. Expect this $5.5 million production to touch down in summer 1984 . . . *BLACKHAWK* has been optioned by Steven Spielberg. The comic book has always been one of his favorites and has been added to his long list of forthcoming motion pictures projects . . . *SPIDER-MAN* has been optioned by Roger Corman for his new Millenium production company. The web-spinner is expected to swing onto the big screen in the future.

New Series from WaRP Graphics, Pacific, Capital & Fantagor

ECLIPSE ENTERPRISES

Publisher Dean Mullaney elaborated a bit on what's coming in Aztec Ace, the new series by Doug Moench and Mike Hernandez (see page 48). Ace, it appears, is a time-traveler. In the first issue, the futuristic hero teams up with an American woman from 1940 to stop the Eboasti Brotherhood from keeping an ancient idol which must be returned to the Aztecs before time itself becomes "unglued." The Coca-Cola-sipping hero carries the head of Sigmund Freud with him—it's the *real* thing—for constant consultation. He often pops into the near-future to fulfill his all-consuming passion for Fritos. The first issue, debuting this summer, will be a 48-page special; then Aztec Ace will be published every six weeks as a normal Baxter book.

Bruce Miller has been hired by Eclipse to ink both *Sabre*, with number five, and *The Scythe* in Ms. Tree, starting with the back-up series' premiere story in issue two. Miller, a former apprentice of Dan Adkins, has been working as a commercial artist. He has also done work for Marvel's merchandising arm and served a short stint with Jim Steranko. This will be his first comic book work.

WaRP GRAPHICS

Richard Pini dropped by our offices in March to tell us about a new project now under development. *The Seekers* will be a special insert printed on tinted paper, in *Elfquest* #16, out in June. It's a trial story for newcomer Colleen Doran and concerns Earth's encounters with aliens. Richard and Doran will script and the series will be printed entirely from her pencils. If, after a few eight-page issues, response warrants it, there will be a spin-off book.

There has been some talk that *Elfquest* itself may go to a quarterly schedule after the main story ends in issue 20. There would be a short break in publishing. Then, it will return with reduced input from Wendy Pini and more material about the Elfquest world.

Several years ago, Wendy attempted to animate Michael Moorcock's classic sword and sorcery novel, *Stormbringer*, for a college project. Ultimately, she found it too immense an undertaking, but she did produce nearly 300 paintings and sketches for the proposed film. Richard is currently talking with publishers about a book which would showcase the art of Wendy Pini, using this material. There would also be commentary by Richard, detailing Wendy's growth and development as an artist, while readers could marvel at a dazzling visual version of the Elric of Melnibone saga.

AARDVAARK-VANAHEIM

Neil the Horse has been so successful that the mini-series has been extended from six to eight issues. Creator Arn Saba will produce a 48-page "extravaganza" in the extra issues.

David Sim and Bill Sienkiewicz produced a Moon Roach story at Rochester's All-Star Convention and it will appear later this year, in *Swords of Cerebus* volume five.

RED CIRCLE

Blue Ribbon Special Edition will be Red Circle's first album, boasting a wraparound cover by Steve Ditko and Rudy Nebres. The 49-page reprint edition features stories from *The Fly* #1–4 with artwork by Joe Simon/Jack Kirby and Al Williamson.

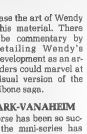
A Comet mini-series has been announced, with art by Carmine Infantino. Another mini-series will focus on the legend of the Black Hood, as told by Robert Kanigher.

Due to positive response, a Katy-Keene one-shot will be released later this year.

PACIFIC COMICS

Bruce Jones' third comic book for Pacific was announced in March. Somerset Holmes will be illustrated by Brent Anderson. The bi-monthly series reteams the Ka-Zar crew to tell the tale of a woman who has no knowledge of her past. In fact, she's more worried about surviving to see her future. The series premieres in June with *Cliff Hanger* for a back-up. A "period piece," *Cliff Hanger* will be illus-

(Continued on page 46)



Rudy Nebres' design for the Fly, to be written by Jack C. Harris, from Red Circle.

The latest edition of the comic collector's bible

The Comic Book Price Guide #13
By Robert M. Overstreet

Paper, $9.95, now at your bookstore. Hard, Book or money order to Crown Publishers, Inc., One Park Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10016. Please add $1.50 for postage and handling. If you live in N.Y., N.Y. add sales tax.

H·A·R·M·O·N·Y
B·O·O·K·S

This is the latest edition of the comic collector's bible, with over 70,000 listings of revised and updated comic book prices, which makes it the most comprehensive and well-respected comic book price guide available. Thirty-two pages of fabulous color portray some of the most notable comic book covers. *The Comic Book Price Guide* is both a serious reference tool and an entertaining look at the world of comics.

The 1983 edition of this steady seller features Timely Comics, the forerunner of Marvel Comics. During the forties, Timely introduced such longtime superhero favorites as Captain America, Human Torch, and Sub-Mariner. Included is a special article by fanzine publisher George Olshevsky.

"Robert Overstreet's fat *Comic Book Price Guide* contains all the market information you need to be a really smart investor, as well as instructions for grading, storing, and caring for these valuable little jokers."

—Chicago Daily News

UNDERGROUND STATION

By BRUCE SWEENEY

A page from the wild and bizarre *Wolverine Woo Boo*

This month's logo is by the famous Jaxon who should have material in print later this year with an u.g. project that's currently hush-hush. Fantagraphics published his stunning *Comanche Moon* in 1982

LAST GASP

Last Gasp is not complaining about the response to *Zap #0*; it was sold out almost as soon as it was released. Wimmer's #6 should be out by now with a collaboration cover and material by Trina Robbins and Terri Boyce. Last Gasp will be distributing some European items such as *Fast Fiction #2* & 3 by David Hinds of England, the Scottish *Celtic #2* and Holland's *Paper Prince*.

EDUCOMICS

Educomics (Box 40246, S.F., CA 94140) has finally released *I SAW IT*; the eyewitness account of the bombing of Hiroshima. The book is possibly the first Japanese comic to come out in a full-color American format. Lorenzo Mattotti started a nationwide tour with the book in April. The book runs 48 pages and is well worth the $2 cover price. Educomics can also point to some successes. The 1st printing of *Food First* Comics came out last September and sold out in two months.

KITCHEN SINK

Kitchen Sink is getting out of the business of distributing u.g.s (turning the business over to Capital Comics) but, nevertheless, has plans to continue assembling material for *Dope #5* and *Death Rattle #4* soon; hopefully, by fall and the next *Harold Hedd* in my next column. Meanwhile, watch for Kitchen's new Steve Canyon *Magazine*.

RIP-OFF PRESS

April Fool's Day marked the release of *Rip-Off* #12, a 64-page magazine featuring an 11-page full-color Freak Brothers story, a color Fat Freddy's Cat story, a color painting by Robert Williams, a four-page "Cootchy Cooty" story by Williams, additional material by Mavrides, Bell and Robbins and a presentation of Danish cartoonists selected by Editor-in-Chief Gilbert Shelton for their humor and art. Rip-Off hopes to go quarterly with this magazine by year's end.

I won't go into the plot; I do believe that there is one but it's wild and unbelievable. Just let me say that mad science, bottled heads, commanco raids and cannibalism all adorn this mad book from which your Aunt Nellie will never recover. The story is so full of mutilations, grotesqueries, torture and carnage that the book is refreshingly cathartic. Coleman pushes us so far beyond Bad Taste that your reaction is stretched from horror to amusement. Like my high school sweetheart; can't says it's cute, but it sure is fun.

ASSORTED EXTRAS

Best "cheap deal" would be Rushhours *Comic Book*, $1 pp from Mike Dugan, 190 Sabre Park, Niagra Falls, NY 14304, with work by Cain and Dugan. . . . Dirt Pub is 50¢ from Steve Postman, 1638 19th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009 and it's silly; but *Dogtown* is a strange little mini slickly and perversely presented for $1.50 . . . *Dogboy* is a slick 7"x9"; $1.50 from Steve Lafler, P.O. Box 982, Eugene, OR 97440 . . . *Extra* is George Erling's new mini for $1 from 721 N. Turnpike, Pompton Plains, NJ 07444 . . . Brad Foster has Goodies #5 available for $1 and *IMMYRRDANWOOD* done by Diane Valentine and Brad . . . Bob Vojtko has hand-colored *Times R Tuff* $1.50 pp from him at 315 Nebraska Ave., Lorain, OH 44052. He also has such minis as *Porno Frog*; *Lugnuts*; *Coupons* and *Bullhorn* for 50¢ and a stamp each. Bob says that many of his cartoons are going into magazines like *Hustler*, *Chic*, *Velvet*, *Woman's World* and the *Christian Science Monitor*. (Be very careful not to confuse your submissions, Bob) . . . *Dinosaur Comics* is 25¢ & a stamp by Jacques Boivin from Phantasu Press, 265 Harlan, Lakewood, CO 80226 and claims to be the first mini of '83; printed New Year's Day . . . *Toxis #1* is $2 from Twister Publications; P.O. Box 1853, Galete, CA 93116 . . . *Sasquatch #1-4* are 50¢ & a stamp each from Steve Willis, 1121 W. Jackson, Olympia, WA 98502 . . . *Spaced #1* & *2* are $1.25 each from Anthony Smith, 1414 Lynnview Dr., Houston, TX 77055 with contents by Tom Stazer with color covers . . . *Tales of Jerry #2* is $2 by Jane Oliver, P.O. Box 1051, Guernseyville, CA 95446 and Holland's Joerst Swarte. Allegedly, a Zippyscope was exhibited in its own glass case and a copy of *Breakdowns* was chained to the wall! The Zippyscope is a small cardboard box with tiny Zippy visuals inside. There were only 100 assembled and sold in 1979.

Sad news from England is that the lovely graphic magazine, *Pssst*, has bitten the dust. Good news is that Brian Talbot notes the first edition of *The Adventures of Luther Arkwright* is nearly sold out. Random House in the U.S. is taking a hard look at the book. I just received my copy a month ago and it's one of the best of its kind, ever.

Four-Fisted Tales #2 came out in February with a $1.50 cover price by Comics Consortium (409 Orange Ave., Mt. View, CA 94040). Where #1 was quite good, #2 is very good. With the first issue, I could not be sure how much was homage to Vaughn Bode and how much was merely derivative. #2 indicates that the influence is clearly there but Kelley's art projects him onto his own path; not Bode's. He has a genuine affection for aviation stories and they're well researched and as nicely executed.

Contributor Silveira has a nine page story which is extremely good. It's a samurai version of Richard Corben and Little John's confrontation at the footbridge but the action is exhilarant; and it's hard to believe that the story runs only nine pages.

The Mystery of Wolverine Woo-Ball ($6.95 pp from Joe Coleman, Box 1416, N.Y.C., NY 10009) is a must-have for u.g. consumers and Whack-cats. Featuring a full color 11"x14" glossy cover and 32 pages; the book boasts a limited run of 2000. After I received my copy, I thumbed through it and put it aside for a month. The press releases hype it as "ornately detailed." The truth of the mater is that the book is almost too busy and cluttered to read.

Almost . . . Once I started on the "storyline," though, I was hooked. Indeed, the material is as dense and initially confusing as much of S. Clay Wilson's earlier material; but the subject material is so sick, that it's mentally wall.

MISCELLANEOUS

Sources in England tell me that both Bill Griffith and Art Speigelman attended a Graphic Art Convention last December in London along with England's Hunt Emerson

Making Mischief & Mayhem with the Man Behind

By ROBERT GREENBERGER

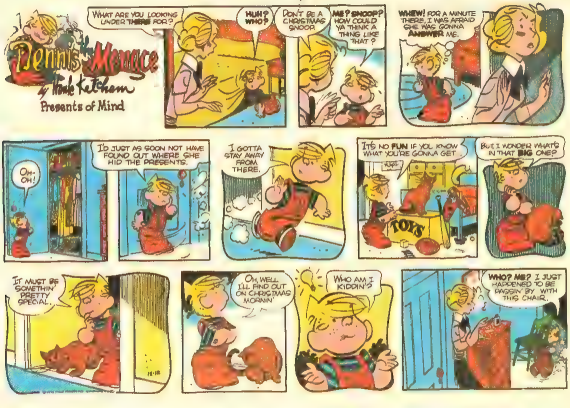
Little children have a universal appeal which defies explanation. We've been enamored of kids in the movies ranging from *The Champ* to Shirley Temple, from *National Velvet* to *Lassie*, from *Kramer vs. Kramer* to *E.T.* It's the younger members of those familiar sitcom families who usually deliver the wisest wisecracks—just look at Ricky Schroder and Gary Coleman. Even the comic strips are filled with children who have become national institutions: Charlie Brown and Dennis Mitchell.

For more than 30 years, Dennis has been a part of America's daily reading requirements. His one-panel comic strip can be found in hundreds of newspapers nationwide and around the world. Until recently, he also lounged in four-color form on the comic racks, and in certain towns, people can still enjoy the TV series starring Jay North. Fawcett Books has just published their 44th paperback collection of daily panels and talk continues about a menacing Broadway musical.

Behind all of this is a friendly, white-

PHOTO BIOGRAPHY ARCHIVE

Hank Ketcham at last year's San Diego Convention.


Dennis the Menace
by Hank Ketcham
Presents of Mind
WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING UNDER THERE FOR?
HUH? WHO?
DON'T BE A CHRISTMAS GHOST!
AW P-SHOOSE? HOW COULD YA THINK A THING LIKE THAT?
WHEW! FOR A MINUTE THERE, I WAS AFRAID SHE WAS GONNA ANSWER ME.
OH-OH!
I'D JUST AS SOON NOT HAVE FOUND OUT WHERE SHE HID THE PRESENTS.
I GOTTA STAY AWAY FROM THERE.
IT'S NO FUN IF YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GONNA GET
TOYS
BUT I WONDER WHAT'S IN THAT BIG ONE?
IT MUST BE SOMETHIN' PRETTY SPECIAL.
OH WELL, I'LL FIND OUT ON CHRISTMAS MORNIN'
WHO AM I KIDDIN'?
WHO? ME? I JUST HAPPENED TO BE PASSIN' BY WITH THIS CHAIR.

Dennis the Menace
by Hank Ketcham
The Great Buzzard of '76
SNOW SMELLS NICE!
SNOW IS AN ODORLESS AND TASTELESS SUBSTANCE.
YOU SHOULDN'T SAY THINGS LIKE THAT AROUND MARGARET!
I FORGOT
MMMM....SMELLS GOOD.
TASTES GOOD, TOO.
WOW! IT'S REALLY SNOWIN' NOW.
IT'S A REAL BLIZZARD!
EVERYTHING SOUNDS FUNNY.
YEAH, IT DON'T HARDLY SOUND AT ALL.
IT'S LIKE IT WAS SNOWIN' IN A BIG ROOM.
MAYBE WE BETTER RUN FOR HOME.
HEY! WHERE DID EVERYTHING GO?
HOLD ON TO MY HAND, DENNIS.
MY HOUSE IS RIGHT HERE SOMEWHERE.
ARE WE LOST?
YOU'RE NOT TOO HERE AND YOU'RE HERE.
SOME THIN' ELSE IS HERE, TOO.
RUFF!
IT'S GOOD OL' RUFF!
RUFF! I LOVE YOU!
THANK GOODNESS I WAS GETTING WORRIED.
RUFF SAVED US.
HE OUGHTA HAVE A LIFE GAINER MEDAL.
I THINK HE'S MILLIN' TO SETTLE FOR A COOKIE.

A sample of the work done by assistants Ron Ferdinand and Sharon Donovan.

haired gentleman who discovered a comic strip idea after an incident at home. Hank Ketcham recalls, "One day, my son, Dennis, was doing his four-year-old thing and his mother, through gritted teeth said, 'Hey, your kid is a menace.' I thought it would be a keen idea for a newspaper feature and I was off and running."

Ketcham's instincts were superb; that one keen idea has spawned a comic strip which remains one of America's most popular, long-lasting and beloved syndicated features. After 18 years abroad, Ketcham returned to the United States about a year ago and spoke about his long career of making mischief with *Dennis the Menace*.

Reading comic strips is something Ketcham remembers especially well from his childhood. He can still recall being fascinated by a new strip about a 25th Century hero named Buck Rogers and talks fondly of the original Hal Foster run on *Tarzan*. "Like most of us," Ketcham says after taking a sip of coffee, "when you're about six years old, you get turned on. In my case, my father was entertaining an art director friend who, to keep me amused, produced a pencil and paper and drew some cartoons. I thought, 'Gee, this guy must be using a magic pencil!' I went to the corner of the room and traced the drawings and copied them. Then, I started tracing newspaper characters and became quite proficient."

As he grew older and became a better artist, Ketcham sampled the glitter of stardom. Teachers took him to classes where, at their direction, he demonstrated his young talent. "What happens is when enough attention is given to a child, his ego is satisfied," Ketcham says, "and you pursue it even more because people will pay more attention to you. Maybe this, from the layman's psychological point of view, is how I perceive it.

"As I became more involved with drawing, every time someone had a drawing problem, they would come to me. The more I found out that you didn't have to go out there and break your nose on the football field in order to get the girls' attention, the happier I was." Ketcham says with an ever-ready smile.

One thing Ketcham discovered in high school is what he advises that *all* would-be artists do: get involved with theater. He feels that since an artist plays the roles of the characters he draws, he may as well learn about how people act, move, talk and think. If possible, he suggests, artists should attend college for an art major and a drama minor. In Ketcham's case, he not only performed in high school shows but also did neighborhood theater.

During his education, Ketcham was also captivated by a relatively new innovation in the movie world: animation. "When Disney released *The Three Little Pigs*, it turned the entertainment world upside down. It just sent skyrockets in the air. I zeroed in on my target. I wanted to work for Walt Disney. I quit the University of Washington, went south to Hollywood and ended up working at Universal with Walt Lantz, learning the craft. I eventually went over to Disney to help clean up *Pinocchio* and then on to *Fantasia* and Donald Duck. When people ask where I went to school, I say the University of Walt Disney. Then, the war started."

World War II was a time when many artists gave up steady jobs to enlist or were drafted and served overseas. Some, like Ketcham and Will Eisner, made contributions in ways other than direct combat, using their talents in the war effort. Ketcham spent four years working in the Office of the Secretary of the Navy. The young recruit edited, wrote and drew a magazine promoting the sale of war bonds to military and civilian personnel. When an order came down to make a series of animated short films for promotional purposes, Ketcham landed the assignment. He returned to Hollywood, meeting animator Chuck Jones and working with him for a time.

Meanwhile, in his off-hours, Ketcham made a name for himself by selling one-panel gags to the top magazines of the time: *Collier's*, *Saturday Evening Post* and others. He both wrote and drew many of the panels, but also began relying on gag writer collaborators for fresh ideas.

Once discharged, Ketcham traveled to New York and began a successful artistic career: contributing gags to the magazines while doing a great deal of advertising art.

"After three years," he says, "I asked, 'Who the hell needs New York with the heat and cold? I remember a place called California.' So, I put the family in a car, drove to California and settled in Carmel. After settling in, I got the idea for *Dennis*."

Ketcham drew a series of samples and sent them to his agent. The following week, a telegram came requesting 10 more. The agent sent the material to the Post-Hall Syndicate, run by Bob Hall in association with Dorothy Schiff, long-time owner of *The New York Post*. The syndicate was a successful one at the time, handling Earl Wilson, Herblock, Walt Kelly's *Pogo*, and then, *Dennis the Menace*.

The strip premiered in 18 newspapers in March 1951. Within a year, Ketcham notes proudly, they were placed within the top 100 markets. The strip's sudden success surprised its creator but he took it all in stride. "It was like a fighter taking off," he says. "People identified with *Dennis* and asked, 'Are you looking into our window?'

Demand for more *Menace* prompted the start of the Sunday page a year later. At the time, Ketcham tried to maintain both but the demands on his time were too great and he began farming out the Sunday page to assistants, starting with Al Wiesman. "Sundays," he says, "tell a different story. There's drawing-to-drawing continuity involved and it must fit different formats: a half-page, a third-page, tabloid. It's a chinese puzzle to work with and you actually only have four panels to tell your story. It becomes a terrible problem."

Ketcham says he prefers the old days when Sunday newspaper sections were stuffed with features, usually one strip per page, occupying the entire page. That golden time allowed for truly imaginative story concepts and panel designs which have virtually vanished in today's minuscule comic formats.

Nowadays, the Sunday strip is always handled by an assistant. Ketcham simply doesn't want to devote the required time to it although it accounts for roughly half his income. (Newspapers pay for comic strips separately on a daily and Sunday basis.) Currently, a young team is handling the page, under Ketcham's watchful eye. Ron Ferdinand, a New York-based artist, and Sharon Donovan from Buffalo submitted materials to Ketcham after he noted in *Cartoonist Profiles* that he was searching for new assistants. "They're both artists," Ketcham explains, "and we're trying to get them more aware of writing. I also beat into them the essentials without making them feel disappointed. Perseverance and enthusiasm are things that you must have in this business. If you are excited about what you're doing, the talent and ability will come later. It *will* come. If you can really taste it all the time, and you can hardly wait to get to work in the morning, then it's worth it all. You don't regard it as work at all, you regard it as a great release."

After trying to do Sundays and dailies on his own for six months, Ketcham relied on assistants and, in later years, worked with

Fred Toole who headed the Ketcham Studios while the creator was abroad. Toole was responsible for packaging the comic book versions of Dennis for various publishers (including Fawcett and Marvel) over the years. Ketcham points out he was the first one to send a writer and artist overseas to research a comic story. The experiment was so successful that frequent trips were made, giving the Dennis comics of the '60s and '70s a truly international flavor, interweaving the Mitchells and travelogue fun.

Ketcham says *Dennis* can work very well in a comic book format. On the other hand, when *Dennis the Menace* signed up with Marvel Comics, the title lost touch with its intended audience—the youngest segment of the comic reading market. "The dummies charged too much for it and sold it in the wrong places like liquor stores and airports. My market isn't there. Besides, the kids are spending their quarters at the video arcade. They will go after the adventure stuff which Marvel does so well, but they won't pay 60¢ for *Dennis*. *Dennis* worked well, looked good, but times have changed," he says with an air of finality.

The years have gone by for comics and Ketcham, but not for Dennis Mitchell. He is eternally five-years-old and his family always seems to own a three-year-old car. And while there isn't a single real Western on television, Cowboy Bob, not Luke Skywalker, is Dennis' idol.

"My feeling about that," Ketcham explains, "is that all children, regardless of their culture, are pretty much the same until they get to be six-years-old and enter the disciplined area of education. They're home with their parents, siblings and neighbors. They're little animals who are growing and developing until they reach six, then they take on a different look.

"These are constants and if I made Dennis any older, then I would have to be contemporary. At this age, I use a number of symbols: Cowboy Bob and the cowboy syndrome is a symbol of adventure), dreaming to be heroic. Sure, I could use Skywalker, but I prefer to keep the old things that I grew up with years ago.

"We have made a big deal over Mrs. Mitchell getting a dishwashing machine. And a couple of years ago, I decided, yes, Dennis can get to ride in an airplane. Before that happened, I didn't want him to fly because at the time, less than 15 percent of the American public had ever been up in the airplane. I thought that was precious little. I didn't want Dennis to be the unusual kid on the block. I want him to be the kid next door with hair in his eyes and dirt in his nose. I want him to be himself."

Ketcham finally spent two weeks' worth of dailies getting Dennis to the airport, aboard the plane and home again. "So, I acknowledge the 20th century, I really do."

Ketcham began traveling in the '50s and spent a great deal of time in Europe. He originally moved to Spain, but then settled in Switzerland due to its location, scenery and up-to-date communication with the United States. Accustomed to working

Dennis The Menace

By Hank Ketch

This is the controversial Dennis panel with the substitute dialogue.

with sketches and a lightbox, he had often had to use candle light or sunlight when the power went out in Spain.

During a tour of Moscow, he watched the pilot episode of the CBS version of *Dennis* at the U.S. Embassy. He sums up his feelings about the popular four-year series in one word: "Terrible." Ketcham continues, "I defy anyone to take a cartoon character and make a good live-action series out of him. It wasn't the *Dennis* I know. I wanted animation, not live-action but I didn't have much clout at the time and CBS said live-action was quicker and cheaper." These days, Ketcham is pursuing his original goal. An animated special is now being planned and if all goes well, it will be the first in a series, a la the *Peanuts* series. Ketcham does not want to see *Dennis* become a Saturday morning TV cartoon.

Ketcham can become fairly outspoken when it comes to something he feels strongly about. A case in point occurred last summer when he was forced to provide an alternative caption to one daily, the gag for July 14. Dennis was walking out of the theater with his pals, saying, "I don't think it was fair to kill the bad guy when I was out taking a leak." Newspaper editors were in an uproar nationwide and the syndicate sent out a notice to advise all editors of the "strong language" used. The substitute line involved Dennis going to the bathroom. This item of word play was picked up by some papers as news while most client papers ran the substitute gag.

"I feel the editors are terribly sensitive about that material. I'm the last of the straight-arrows and I would never let Dennis get into a position where he gets 'blue.' I am a very strict father and I treat Dennis with discipline and respect. On the other hand, I don't want my audience to go to sleep and I don't want to take them for granted.

"There's another one I've been using since I started giving talks and I'm going to use it in print one of these days. It shows his mother in the bathroom, turning the water in the tub on while Dennis is standing on a stool with his hands on hips and the toilet seat up. He says to her, "I don't have to wash my hands, Mom, I didn't steer it this time.' I think that's cute, but I haven't had the gumption to release the panel until now," Ketcham says.

He is very concerned about the condition of the comic strips today, how the features are being neglected and mistreated by editors. Ketcham remembers when the strips were one of the only reasons that people bought papers and he contends that now, newspapers should give the features sufficient space, allowing them to become loss-leaders and generate that daily interest in newspaper reading. "They're absolutely out of their skulls to shrink the size of the strips to accommodate advertising. It should be just the opposite. People certainly don't buy the newspapers for the train wrecks and plane crashes. I think I'm designing postage stamps for some papers. It's horrendous. They're chicken and I don't mind calling them on it. All I'm trying to do is keep from getting bored."

Curiously, plans to keep things fresh involve taking some old ideas and restaging them in today's environment, showing how the audience and the characters have changed over the years. It won't be like what happened with *Ann Landers* and *Dear Abby*, Ketcham warns, it just means taking a perfectly good idea and reusing it with a new twist. The rerun will be redrawn and otherwise new.

Ketcham also has ideas for many things he wants to do in the future. For instance, he would like to write a second book. His first, *I Want to Go Home*, concerned his experiences in Russia and was released by McGraw-Hill roughly 13 years ago. "That was when the publishers in New York were having a contest to see who could publish a book without anybody knowing about it and McGraw-Hill won," Ketcham says sarcastically.

But, for now, Hank Ketcham is perfectly happy to spend his time with Dennis, the son and the strip. Both have given him plenty of pleasure throughout the years and he doesn't want to change that at all. To keep things interesting after three decades, Hank Ketcham wants to get more involved with other aspects of the media, including animation ("I got spoiled by all that Chuck Jones stuff," he says) and *Menace* merchandising. For audiences the world over, things couldn't sound better. The mischief is only beginning. ■

DENNIS the MENACE

"HE MUST BE AROUND HERE SOMEPLACE ... THERE'S HIS GETAWAY BIKE."

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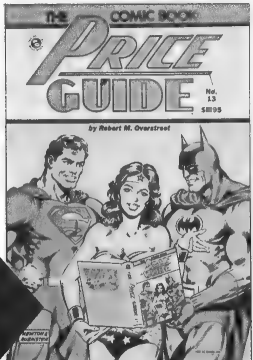


WITH THE PURCHASE OF . . .

Are You Ready for Rock & Rule?

By FRED PATTEN

What happens when the future's top rock star decides to destroy the Earth with "scientific" black magic? Can a hopeful new rock group make it in a mutant-ridden, post-Doomsday world? Above all, can a relatively new animation studio convince today's public that its first feature combines all the best elements of *Phantom of the Paradise* (rock music and demonology), *Blade Runner* (a fascinatingly sleazy futuristic civilization), *Sleeping Beauty* (a charismatically evil villain and a truly frightening monster), and *Heavy Metal* (music by several top rock performers, and modern comic-book graphics)? We'll find out in May when Nelvana Ltd.'s 85-minute *Rock & Rule* comes out.

Big success continued to elude the animation industry during 1982. There were five major new releases: Don Bluth's *The Secret of NIMH*; Disney's *TRON*; Rankin/Bass' *The Last Unicorn*; Hanna-Barbera's *Heidi's Song*; and Warner Brothers' *Bugs Bunny's 1,001 Rabbit Tales*. The best that any of them did was to make enough money to cover production costs, but not advertising and distribution expenses. *Rock & Rule* is the latest attempt to prove that animation can still bring in big bucks. Its approach is to abandon the traditional "family entertainment" market for cartoons, and to concentrate on the young adult, rock music fan market that made successes of such films as the live-action *Phantom of the Paradise* and *Heavy Metal*, plus the SF and horror market.

A VIEW OF THE FUTURE

Rock & Rule is set in the overcrowded, super-polluted future. Society is breaking down. People are alienated from each other, and the decaying big cities are withdrawing into isolated, medieval walled towns. Science is used only for frivolity, to create new toys for the cynical public. One of the biggest remaining interests is the entertainment industry, whose king is Mok, the rock singer and electronics genius. Mok's super-psychedelic concerts have kept him at the top of the charts for as long as anyone can remember. But at last he is growing old. Mok also is the world's greatest egotist, and he would rather destroy civilization than allow any new stars to replace him. He has discovered a parallel dimension inhabited by giant amorphous demons, and he plans a farewell performance at which his electronics and voice will draw one of these demons to Earth. If it doesn't completely destroy the world, it will at least guarantee that his name will be remembered by the survivors throughout history, along with Attila the Hun, Genghis Khan, and Adolf Hitler.

However, Mok's voice is no longer capable of producing the precise vibrations necessary to pierce the dimensional veil. He must find a younger singer to act as his pawn. The only one good enough turns out to be Angel, the backup singer in a small-town rock quartet. The group is controlled by Angel's boyfriend, the sullen Omar, who insists on playing harsh punk-rock numbers rather than softer songs advocating tenderness and togetherness as Angel urges. Mok tries to charm Angel into performing at his farewell concert by promising to introduce her as his successor, but she refuses to abandon her friends. Mok therefore kidnaps her from Ohmtown to big-city Nuke York, to blackmail or brainwash her into using her voice for his musical Armageddon. Omar and the other two comedy-relief members of his group, Stretch and Dizzy, must make their way cross-country and try to break into the sealed-off metropolis to rescue Angel, not realizing that much more is at stake than the future of their own band.

ANIMATED BEGINNINGS

Although *Rock & Rule* is Nelvana's first theatrical feature, the Canadian studio is not really a newcomer. It celebrated its tenth anniversary last year as one of the largest animation studios in North America. Nelvana was created in 1972 by two young movie enthusiasts who had met at York University in Toronto. Michael Hirsh was born in Belgium but moved with his family to Toronto at the age of three. Patrick Loubert is a native Canadian. Hirsh, a philosophy major, and Loubert, an English major, decided that what they really wanted to do was to make motion pictures together. After graduation, they went to work for a commercial studio which made short animated films. They were disappointed to find themselves given more janitorial jobs than creative work. Too impatient to stay around long enough to rise to better assignments, they decided to go into business for themselves.

In 1970, Hirsh and Loubert borrowed some money and rented a basement to open their own studio, Laff Arts. They also talked a young British commercial artist, Clive Smith, into joining the partnership as their art designer. Hirsh and Loubert hunted for clients without success. Later that year, they were introduced to John Ezrin, a retired publisher who had printed original Canadian comic books during World War II, when importation of U.S. comics had been banned as nonessential luxuries. These "Canadian whites" (most of them had been printed without color) had long since been forgotten, but Ezrin still had many of the printing plates. Hirsh, Loubert and Smith raised enough money to buy Ezrin's collection. With it, they put together their first project, *The Great Canadian Comic Books*, a hardcover book designed for comic-art fans and for Canadian libraries specializing in national popular culture. They also designed a TV documentary which interviewed some of the comics' artists and writers who still lived around Toronto, and brought the comic-book heroes to animated life. The Canadian Broadcasting Company agreed to fund this documentary. The CBC also commissioned them to produce five 13-minute children's films for $2,000 each.

With this backing, the three partners moved in 1972 from their basement office to a commercial warehouse on Toronto's waterfront and opened an actual studio. They also took this opportunity to change its name from the forgettable Laff Arts to the more memorable Nelvana. Nelvana of the Northern Lights had been a superheroine in one of those World War II comic books — Canada's version of Wonder Woman.

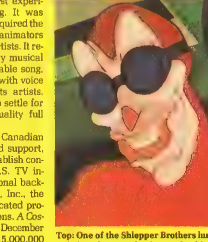
From 1972 through 1975, Nelvana produced live-action and animated documentaries and educational films for the CBC and for Canadian governmental agencies. It also began making animated TV commercials. All of these brought in barely enough money to keep Nelvana open, but they allowed Hirsh, Loubert, Smith and a tiny staff to develop experience with different animation techniques. Each film was planned to allow Nelvana to experiment in some new area of animation. Some of these educational films won Canada Council Film Awards, and similar publicity for the little studio.

By 1976, Nelvana felt ready to make the jump into commercial television production. It designed a half-hour animated TV special, *A Cosmic Christmas*, a gently sardonic lesson on "the true meaning of Christmas" in a SF format. *A Cosmic Christmas* gave Nelvana its first experience in large-scale filmmaking. It was almost a year in production. It required the expansion of the studio to 10 animators and another dozen supporting artists. It required developing a high-quality musical score with at least one memorable song, and learning to work smoothly with voice actors, musicians, sound-effects artists, etc. Nelvana was determined to settle for nothing less than theatrical-quality full animation.

This cost more than the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation could support, so Hirsh and Loubert had to establish contacts with the much larger U.S. TV industry. They found their additional backing from Viacom International, Inc., the U.S.'s biggest supplier of syndicated programs for independent TV stations. *A Cosmic Christmas* was broadcast on December 7, 1977 and was watched by 15,000,000 people—the largest audience to that time of any syndicated TV program other than Lawrence Welk. Nelvana had secured its position as a serious animation studio.

DANIEL MOUSE & STAR WARS

During the next three years, Nelvana went from success to success with a series of half-hour holiday TV specials: *The Devil and Daniel Mouse*, *Rome-O and Julie-8*, *Intergadactic Thanksgiving*, and *Easter Fever*. Each received a bigger budget and allowed the studio to expand its staff and abilities. Rave reviews and awards began pouring in. George Lucas picked Nelvana to produce a 15-minute animated *Star Wars* adventure for a 1978 Thanksgiving program. *The Star Wars Holiday Special*. By the time it reached *Intergalactic Thanksgiving*, Nelvana was commissioning major comedians to play its lead characters and designing those characters around those celebrities: Sid Caesar, Garrett Morris of *Saturday Night Live*, and Phil Silvers. Young animators who were dissatisfied with the low quality of Saturday-morning TV animation in Hollywood flocked to Nelvana to work.



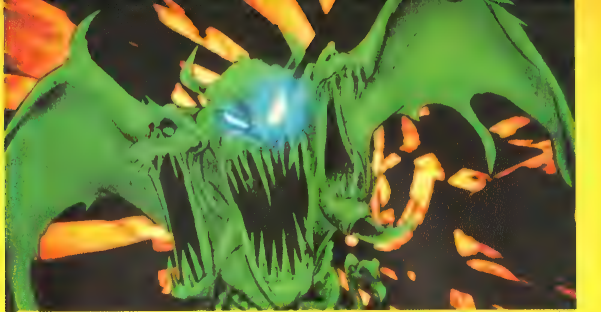
Top: One of the Shlepper Brothers lunges for a victim. Above: Mok grins at what his science and sorcery will conjure up.

Naturally, an animated theatrical feature had been Nelvana's dream since the studio had opened. After *Rome-O and Julie-8* scored its third success in a row (April 1979), Nelvana felt ready to begin. This caused a change in the TV specials' look, as Hirsh, Loubert, and Smith began cutting back on the amount of attention that they gave to the specials. By 1980, the specials had been turned over completely to the studio's younger animators and directors. *Take Me Up to the Ball Game*, broadcast in September 1980, was intended to be the first of a series of sports-season TV specials. However, it proved to be Nelvana's first failure, earning such low ratings that Viacom cancelled the rest of the series. Nelvana decided to concentrate entirely on its feature, and to withdraw from all new TV projects until the motion picture was finished.

Nelvana did not originally have a specific story in mind. Hirsh, Loubert and Smith just knew that they wanted to produce an animated feature someday. A story began to take form while they worked on their second TV special, *The Devil and Daniel Mouse*. This 1978 Halloween special was a funny-animal musical modernization of Stephen Vincent Benet's classic short story, *"The Devil and Daniel Webster."* Dan and Jan Mouse are young hopeful rock singers. The Devil, in the form of B.L. Zeebub, president of a big record company, promises to make Jan a big star. But when he comes to claim her soul, Jan realizes what she has done and flees back to Dan. Her contract is unbreakable, so Dan calls for a trial at which he musically convinces the judge and jury that "a song in the heart beats the Devil every time."

"*The Devil and Daniel Mouse* influenced *Rock & Rule* tremendously," producer Michael Hirsh says. "We felt at the time that it could easily have been a theatrical feature." Their original concept for the climax was judged too frightening for TV family audiences, so they had to lighten it considerably. When they began to seriously consider theatrical concepts, it was natural to look back on *DDM* and how they had to hold themselves back from using that story's full potential. Also, Nelvana's staff consisted of young creative artists who were fans of the latest in rock music. *DDM* had given them the pleasure of working closely with a single rock star (Lovin' Spoonful's John Sebastian). A movie using the same lines offered the potential of working with many more of their favorites. Finally, audience trends were pointing more strongly toward films aimed at the youth market rather than the older family market.

Rock & Rule (originally titled *Drats!*, the name of Omar's rock group) was as large a step upward for Nelvana as the step from shoestring documentaries to *A Cosmic Christmas* had been. The artistic staff, which had grown to 70 people with *Rome-O and Julie-8*, was to increase to 200 people at the peak of production on *R&R*. Tom Joerin, an editor who had worked on the half-hour specials, describes *R&R* as, "A lot more complicated! It's not like multiplying a half-hour special times three; it's more like multiplying a half-hour times 20!" Whole new departments had to be created for design and special effects. Extensive new equipment had to be bought or built, including one of the most ad-



The creatures above are just part of the terror unleashed by Mok's concert near the climax of the film. Below: the other Schlepper brother.

vanced computerized multi-plane cameras outside Hollywood. Veteran animators were brought to Nelvana to conduct animation classes, including some of the famous "nine old men" of Walt Disney Productions. Since Viacom's distribution system was limited to television, Hirsh had to travel to Hollywood to find a theatrical distributor, finally selecting MGM/UA, the distributor of last year's family-oriented *Secret of NIMH*.

DEBBIE HARRY VS LOU REED

Rock & Rule depends so heavily upon music that it was especially necessary to work closely with the movie's musical performers from the start. A versatile sound was wanted, rather than depending upon any single artist or group. The main focus was upon Mok, the villain, since he was supposed to represent this world's greatest star. Rock and roll giant Lou Reed was selected to both compose and perform Mok's songs. Reed has been prominent since the mid-1960s, and his *The Blue Mask* was named one of the Ten Best of 1982 by Time magazine. Angel's numbers were composed and performed by Blondie's Debbie Harry and her partner, Chris Stein. The songs for Omar and his group are by Cheap Trick, who have won nearly 40 gold and platinum records since they were formed in 1972. *R&R*'s climactic number, Omar and Angel's "Send Love Through," features Cheap Trick's guitarist Rick Nielson and vocalist Robin Zander performing together with Debbie Harry and Chris Stein. Mok's indescribably horrific monster (Hirsh says, "We were definitely inspired by Lovecraft!") is musically summoned by Iggy Pop, the "godfather of punk." The decadence of this future age is personified by Earth, Wind & Fire in a fast-paced Nuke York dance club sequence, "Dance, Dance, Dance," which fuses the sounds of jazz, rock, soul, and funk into a single psychedelic whirlwind.

These performers are also reflected visually in *Rock & Rule*. It's no accident that Angel looks like Debbie Harry herself, or that Stretch of Omar's band looks like Cheap Trick's Rick Nielson (who styles himself after Huntz Hall of the Bowery Boys). Mok is a combination of "all the great bad men of rock." Lou Reed, Mick Jagger, and David Bowie. Michael Hirsh jokes that he'll leave audiences to decide for themselves whether the Monster "is" Iggy Pop. These images along with those of the film's other characters were designed by Nelvana's senior animator, Frank Nissen. Nissen was the principal animator for Omar, giving him a James Dean-early Marlon Brando look. Senior background artist Louis Kawagna was in charge of creating the gritty futuristic setting.

Rock & Rule carried many of Nelvana's staff and performers to new heights, or into new areas altogether. The screenplay was by Peter Sauder and John Halfpenny, who started at the studio as animators

Mok, in full gear, schemes for global annihilation and must capture

Some of the voices are performed by professional actors new to Nelvana, and some by veterans such as Martin Lavut (Weez Weasel in *DDM* and Mylar, the slick agent in *R&R*) or Susan Roman (many female voices in earlier Nelvana productions and Angel in *R&R*). However, the voice of Stretch, one of *R&R's* major supporting characters, is that of Greg Duffel, whose main work at Nelvana previously was as a director. Patricia Cullen, who has been in charge of music for all Nelvana's films since *DDM*, composed the general score for the feature and arranged some of the individual songs including the finale, "Send Love Through."

Nelvana's new Special Effects department grew to a staff of 20 under the supervision of Norm Stangel and Keith Ingham. Michael Hirsh, looking at the movie from a professional viewpoint, says, "The most exciting thing about *Rock & Rule*, to me, is its combination of animation and special effects. It broadens the horizon of what an animated movie is." Director Clive Smith threw himself into *R&R* to a greater extent than on any of Nelvana's previous projects. Smith directed over 60 animators, and supervised the correlation of the drawing with the musical sequences. He even personally prepared the layouts for the comic-book edition of *R&R* to be released by Marvel Comics, instead of following the usual procedure of simply sending the script to the comic-book publisher to be developed completely by its own artists.

PRESENT & FUTURE PLANS

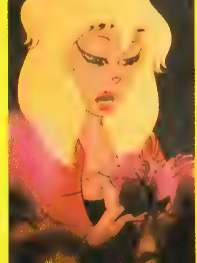
Rock & Rule was to have been released during 1982, but the unexpected magnitude of the production (complicated by Nelvana's move to a newer, larger studio in mid-year) delayed its completion until now. This removed Nelvana from public notice since 1980, not counting TV reruns and the release of all the TV specials on two *Nelvanimation* home-rental video tapes. But as soon as the animation for *R&R* was completed, two new half-hour TV specials were begun. As Hirsh puts it, "*Rock & Rule* took us out of circulation for awhile, but now we're back with a vengeance!" Audiences will have a chance to see these TV specials before *R&R's* release, due to the faster pace of TV scheduling. The first is the latest *Strawberry Shortcake* special for American Greetings Corporation, scheduled for early April, and the second is *Herself the Elf*, due in late April. These were produced not merely to get Nelvana back in the public's eye, but to keep Nelvana's staff working. Even so, a number of artists had to be laid off after *Rock & Rule* was finished. "We have a large percentage of the market share in animated specials," Hirsh says, "but that's not sufficient to keep a large staff working constantly. We have to be in the theatrical feature business on a continuing basis."

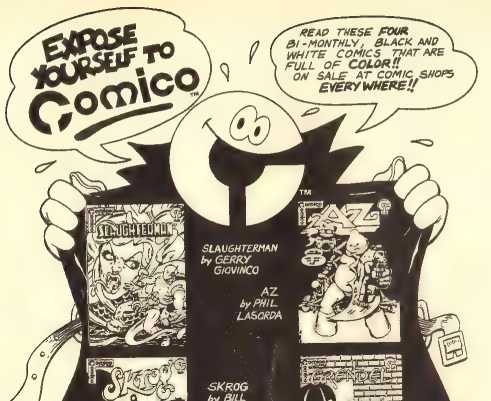
What plans does Nelvana have for the future? Everything depends, of course, upon the public's acceptance of *Rock & Rule* for further theatrical productions. Assuming that *R&R* is a success, Nelvana is seriously considering several new features. The studio has taken options on two popular alternate-comic series, Wendy & Richard Pini's *Elfquest* and Gilbert Shelton's *Wonder Wart-hog*. Nelvana is also interested in branching out into live-action production. It is working with Marvel Comics to produce a live-action *X-Men* theatrical film (to feature Cyclops, Storm, Wolverine, Ariel and Phoenix), and with newspaper cartoonist Dick Moores to do a live-action *Gasoline Alley* TV movie which they hope will lead to a regular TV series spin-off. Another concept in the planning stage is an educational children's TV series, *The Science Twins*, a combination of dramatic fiction and science, intended for the planned Disney TV channel in the U.S. and for the CBC in Canada. More TV animated specials are also planned, including an adaptation of Bette Midler's forthcoming book, *Baby Divine*.

All these are in the future, however. At the moment, everyone at Nelvana is anxiously awaiting the pubic's reaction to *Rock & Rule*. They are aware that animation has a particularly low chance of success, no matter how good a feature may be, because of the public's tendency to overlook it as "just kids' stuff." But they are convinced that *R&R* will be a success if it can just be brought to the attention of the teenage and young adult audiences. Hirsh is proud of "the eclectic nature of the movie. It ranges in content from the silly to the sublime; in music from the sound of Earth. Wind & Fire to Iggy Pop; in animation from the Uncle Mikey sequence, which is the most limited animation that we've ever done, to the full-animation subtlety of Omar, which I feel ranks with the best animation that Disney has ever done." *Rock & Rule* has what it should take to please this audience; it has the musical feel of *Heavy Metal* plus the single, coherent science-fiction story that *Heavy Metal* lacked. MGM/UA can be counted upon to deliver *Rock & Rule* to the theaters. After that, it will be up to the public to show whether Nelvana's approach will guide the direction of animation in the years to come. ■

Fred Patten is an animation historian who reported on the life and times of Crusader Rabbit in COMICS SCENE #6 and 7.

. . . Angel, an innocent singer.

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Guest Spot

Comic Book Morality: The Impending Crisis

Should the comics receive ratings like the movies?

By JAN STRNAD

An active fan turned professional writer, Jan Strnad has been part of the comics industry for over a decade. Throughout the '70s, he was known for his collaborations with artist Richard Corben on several graphic novels including Tales of the Arabian Knights. *Currently, the two have* Jeremy Brood *in release and are planning a second story to appear in a new magazine from Corben. Strnad has also written comics stories for Marvel and DC. His most recent work has been dialoguing the four-part* Sword of the Atom *mini-series (see page 56).*

It's safe to say that most comic book readers today weren't around for the Wertham/E.C. Congressional debates over comic book content in the early 1950's. I wasn't even around then except as a toddling little creature you had to keep everything breakable away from. But I've read about it and I'm acquainted with the result: the Comics Code Authority.

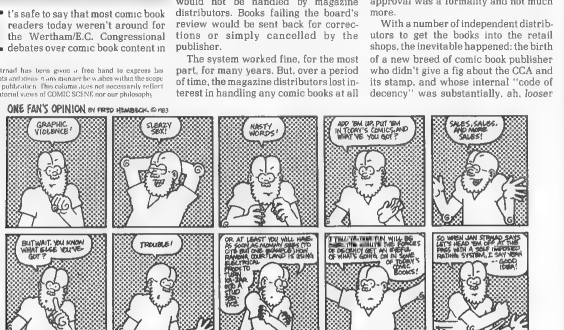
The decision was this: the comic books would police themselves by having every comic book reviewed by an independent board of censors; books that passed the board's scrutiny would receive a seal of approval (the funny stamplike thing in the upper right corner of Marvel and DC comics). Without the seal, the book would not be handled by magazine distributors. Books failing the board's review would be sent back for corrections or simply cancelled by the publisher.

The system worked fine, for the most part, for many years. But, over a period of time, the magazine distributors lost interest in handling any comic books at all because they weren't as profitable as other magazines. Distribution became spotty, and for a while, it was hard for a comic book fan to find all the comics he might want to buy.

So, shops opened up that specialized in comic books. And distributors emerged to service those shops. And the new distributors didn't care much about the CCA's seal of approval one way or the other. And by that time, neither did the publishers—their own internal codes were stricter than the CCA's in most instances, so obtaining the board's approval was a formality and not much more.

With a number of independent distributors to get the books into the retail shops, the inevitable happened: the birth of a new breed of comic book publisher who didn't give a fig about the CCA and its stamp, and whose internal "code of decency" was substantially, ah, *looser*

Mr. Strnad has been given a free hand to express his thoughts and views in any manner he wishes within the scope of the publication. This column does not necessarily reflect the editorial views of COMIC SCENE nor our philosophy.


ONE FAN'S OPINION BY FRED HEMBECK, © 1983
GRAPHIC VIOLENCE!
SLEAZY SEX!
NASTY WORDS!
AND YOU AIN'T PUT YOU IN TODAY'S COMICS, AND WHAT'VE YOU GOT?
SALES, SALES, AND MORE SALES!
BUT WHAT YOU KNOW WHAT MAKE YOUNG-SAT ?
TROUBLE!
OR, AT LEAST YOU WILL HAVE, IF SOME OF MANDY WEIRDOS GET BY OUR OWN BOARD OF NOT-SO-HARMLESS QUESTIONS TO SEVEN BABYSITTERS
I THINK I'M GONNA PUT ALL BIG BOOBS ON THE INSIDE OF THE COVERS SO PEOPLE'LL GET AN EYEFUL OF WHAT'S GOING ON IN SOME OF TODAY'S BOOKS!
SO WHEN JAN STRNAD SAYS IT'S TIME TO TAKE OFF THE PRIG WITH A SOUP-SPOONED BATHING SUIT, I SAY WHY
GOOD IDEA!
THANK!
BUT YOU'RE ALL SAYING WHAT THE BECAME OF MORALITY AIN'T SO TRUE—AFTER ALL, WHEN BOOKS OF PLAYBOY AND PENTHOUSE SEEM TO HIT OUR NEWS'S RACK, I STANDS BACK AND SHOUTS AGAINST
DON'T YOU?
YEAH, BUT IT'D LIKE TO SEE HOW LONG THEY WOULD LAST IF THEY DRAWERS STARTED SELLING PLAYBOY AND PENTHOUSE TO LITTLE KIDS, YOU DIG ME?
THAT'S THE REPUBLIC SHOWS OBJECTIONABLE VARIOUS MATERIAL OUT OF THE HANDS OF THE LITTLEST, THINGS AND THE SOCIAL APPROVAL MANNERS OF ADULT-HOOD
SOMEWHERE, SOMEHOW, THERE'S GOTTA BE SOME-THING HERE
GO OTHER COMICS PUBLISHERS, WHY DON'CHA SOME STRNADS IDEA SOME SERIOUS THOUGHT?
5 MINUTES BOTTOM, TIMMY SACHS, A SWEET SWEET-BATHING COSTUME, HEADLIGHT YOU SAY?...

than that of the major comic book publishers. At the same time, the major companies were relaxing their standards in an attempt to broaden a shrinking marketplace and bolster sagging sales.

With the final result that comics can no longer be assumed to be "clean." Something that looks like a standard comic book, smells like a standard comic book, and sells for the same price as a standard comic book, may contain very unstandard words and pictures . . . *dirty* words and pictures.

Examples abound. Incestuous rape in Epic Comic's *Dreadstar*. Kinky sex and gore in Pacific's *Twisted Tales*. Cannibalism in DC's *The Omega Men*. Menstruation in Eclipse's *Sabre*. Profanity in First's *E-Man*.

And all this while a wave of conservative morality sweeps America, washing *Catcher in the Rye* and *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Huckleberry Finn* and other "indecent" material before it.

Inevitably, these two opposing waves —the relaxed standards of the comic book industry and the constricting standards of a conservative public—must collide. I don't think the comics will fare well in such a collision.

Somebody complains to the local authorities. A few books are purchased by plainclothes police and shown to a judge. The judge rules that there is cause for concern. The offending bookstore's doors are padlocked by the sheriff until the case comes to court. By the time this happens, the small business is out of business.

To avoid this dire scenario, stores make unofficial deals with the local authorities: certain types of books will not be carried, or will be kept behind the counter or in the back room and patrons will have to ask to see them; proof of age will be required before the store owner sells the books.

Store owners don't like this. It's a hassle, and it cuts down on sales. Publishers don't like it either; they know that half the sales battle is getting the book out of the box and prominently displayed in the store. And it doesn't really help concerned parents all that much unless they're present in the store at the time of purchase. How else can they tell if a book came from the lower shelf or from behind the counter?

Many people will tell parents how it's their duty to carefully screen the books their children read, including comic books. This suggestion is, of course, unfeasible. Parents don't have the time or inclination to see every television show their children want to watch or to go every movie or to read every book and every comic. With comics in particular, a parent can't be expected to familiarize himself or herself with every title.

Parents need broad, reasonable guidelines to follow. With television, it's time of broadcast. With movies, it's the G, PG, R, and X rating system. When the kid asks if he can go see *Breakfast of the Living Dead*, all the parent needs to do is to look in the newspaper and check out the rating.

No such rating system exists for comic books. A parent can't glance at the cover of a comic and be told what's inside. A parent can't say, "No R's or X's." No, the current methods is much less exact.

Previously, anything that looked like a comic could be assumed to be "clean." Adult material came in black-and-white books plainly labelled "For Adults Only" or in magazine format books like *Heavy Metal* and *Epic Illustrated* or in expensive graphic albums. This limitation no longer applies. So, what can we expect the typical parental reaction to be upon discovering naked women in the guise of superheroines?

Of course. "*No more comic books for you, young man!*"

If the problem gets serious enough, the more politically minded parents will suggest a review board of persons who will approve or disapprove comic book content, and without whose seal it will be illegal to distribute the book. Sound familiar?

Personally, I don't want the CCA to get its teeth back. It was a dumb idea in the 1950s and it's a dumb idea now. And totally unnecessary.

The obvious, simple solution to this nascent problem is to adopt the ratings system employed by the movie industry, and to emblazon a rating of G, PG, R, or X to every comic. Voluntarily. Before anybody raises a big stink and before the government feels compelled to "do something."

The ratings would be assigned by the publishers themselves to their own titles, according to a set of published guidelines, without the need for a review board. R-rated books would be sold only to those readers 16 years old or older; X's would be restricted to adults. The restrictions would be voluntary, enforced by each retailer as strictly as he saw fit for his local community.

Human beings are crisis-oriented. We tend not to act until we must. We're not too good at heading off problems before they become serious, and when we're forced into a worsening situation we tend to over-react.

The comic book morality crisis is not far off. We can take a simple action now and avoid the brunt of the storm, or we can wait until the storm is upon us and the windows are rattling and the roof's in the next county to try to salvage what we can of our various publishing empires. I propose that we act, *now*, while we can still do so simply and effectively, *without* outside interference.

Jenette Kahn, James Galton, Rick Obadiah, Bill Schanes, Dean Mullaney, Gary Groth, Richard Corben—the ball's in your court. ■

Flashing Across the Empire with Al Williamson

The veteran illustrator recalls his days at E.C. Comics and rediscovers his work on Flash Gordon *and* Star Wars

By JAMES VAN HISE and ANDREW MAYFAIR

May 25 will bring *Return of the Jedi* to theaters across the country and at the same time, the Marvel Comics Super Special adaptation will be hitting newsstands and comic shops everywhere. Although the film ends the adventures of Luke Skywalker, Han Solo and Princess Leia, the comic version is just another chapter in the continuing, equally galaxy-spanning career of Al Williamson.

The Pennsylvania-based artist has made a career out of illustrating science-fiction stories, beginning with the E.C. Comics in the 1950s and graduating to a labor of love, the *Flash Gordon* comic book

PHOTO: BONNIE LEMAY

COMICS SCENE publisher Kerry O'Quinn, left, chats with Archie Goodwin and Al Williamson at last October's FantaSciCon 3.

in the '60s, before taking over the *Star Wars* strip in 1980 and drawing both *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Jedi* adaptations published by Marvel Comics.

At age 21, Williamson was the youngest staff member at E.C., working alongside an incredible array of talents including Al Feldstein, Wally Wood, Jack Davis, Graham Ingels, Frank Frazetta, John Severin and Joe Orlando. "The E.C. stuff I'm probably still the proudest of," he explains, "are things I did for them later, like 'Fish Story' 'Lost in Space' and especially 'Food for Thought.' I still like much of what Roy Krenkel and I did in 'Food for Thought.' That was one written especially for me and it was the first—and only—story which I laid out myself. Usually, the artist received the story already ruled and lettered on the page, but I asked them to please let me lay that one out first before they had it lettered. And they agreed.

"That's why it doesn't have the traditional E.C. splash page and why I have a long panel here and there in it. It was only supposed to be a seven-page story. The new Comics Code rejected that version because of the ending's violent nature and so I was given an eighth page already lettered (you can see the difference because it looks so conventional) and on that page, everyone was rescued from the man-eating tree."

Long before he drew for the comics, he was reading them, attracted to the Spanish editions of *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers* he found in Bogota, Colombia, where the Williamson family lived at the time. And he found himself becoming addicted to the action/adventure serials of the '30s and '40s, starting with the Buster Crabbe *Flash Gordon* epics.

His family moved back to America in 1943, where, at age 14, Williamson began attending art classes taught by Burne Hogarth (COMICS SCENE #5). In 1948, Williamson began his professional career by assisting Hogarth in pencilling three *Tarzan* Sunday pages. Later that year, he sold his first comic book story, "Thin Ice on Shell Bank Creek," in *Heroic* #51.

Once an established artist, Williamson began befriending his fellow artists and two long-term relationships were formed: both the late Wally Wood (COMICS SCENE #2) and the late Roy G. Krenkel (see page 14 and STARLOG #72) were close associates of Williamson. Wood was the one to urge Williamson to send samples of his work to E.C. publisher William M. Gaines.

In the following years, Williamson contributed only two horror stories (one of which was his first E.C. work, by choice, "The Thing in the Glades" in *Tales from the Crypt* #31) and several science-fiction stories. He often turned to his friends for artistic assistance in tight spots, such as the time both Krenkel and Frank Frazetta contributed to "Mad Journey" in *Weird Fantasy* #14.

In the case of his much-beloved "Food for Thought," "Roy did the first page of that strip except for the insert panel and he also did most of the spaceships in the story," Williamson explains. "I did the jungle scenes and everything else. Roy Krenkel was one of the guys who really helped me in the business in many ways. He taught me a great deal and really got me out of myself. He was a good friend and we had great times together. He was a hell of a guy."

Before and after E.C., Williamson contributed to the American Comics Group line—*Forbidden Worlds*, *Out of the Night*—drawing fantasy and SF stories including another collaboration with Frazetta. Then, in 1955, Williamson began a five-year stint drawing more than 100 short stories for Stan Lee's Atlas (pre-Marvel) titles. In addition to his solo work, Williamson often teamed up in combination with Krenkel, Ralph Mayo, Grey Morrow or Angelo Torres for various tales.

He also toiled for Harvey Comics—and inked three Jack Kirby Three Rocketeers tales—but some of those stories didn't turn up until almost a decade later in such obscure titles as *Alarming Adventures* and the giant-sized comic, *Blast Off*.

A Williamson/Reed Crandall story, "Hermit," is noteworthy because it marks the first professional sale by Archie Goodwin. Williamson said, "We've been old friends for a long time. We always enjoyed the movies together, goofing off. We just paled around." Williamson encouraged Goodwin to become a writer and has enjoyed working with him since then.

After comic book work, Williamson drifted into the comic strip world and began a five-year gig, 1960-1964, assisting John Prentice on the popular *Rip Kirby*. Williamson adds that he also ghosted several for several other features including John Cullen Murphy's *Big Ben Bolt*.

When Goodwin ascended to the editorship of the brand-new *Creepy* in 1964, he plotted to bring Williamson back to comic books, penning stories specifically with him in mind. Williamson did a handful of tales, including the beautiful "H_2O World," with Krenkel, between 1964-66. He didn't do any other work for Warren

until the '70s and three SF tales for Creepy, scripted by Bruce Jones.

Some of Williamson's most reknowned comics work appeared in 1966. In *Witzend*, the Wally Wood-edited magazine, an old story, originally done in 1953, finally saw print. "Savage World" was assembled by Williamson, Krenkel, Torres and Frazetta originally for a line of Buster Crabbe comics which never got off the ground. Wood rewrote and retettered the story in 1975 and sold it to Marvel for their *Unknown Worlds of Science Fiction* magazine.

Williamson's dreams of science-fiction heroes came true in 1966, when King Features assigned him the art chores on their revived *Flash Gordon* comic book. "I always wanted to do that strip," he said. "It seemed like everyone else got to draw it *but* me, so this was a wonderful opportunity. The pay was minimal, but I grabbed it. The first book was a glorious job, one I really enjoyed."

ARTWORK © 1983 LUCASFILM LTD.

Lucasfilm allowed only a page of the *Jedi* adaptation to be released. It's from early in the film and takes place aboard the rebuilt Death Star.

The comic book adventures of *Flash Gordon* were scripted by a small group of writers, beginning with Larry Ivie but including Williamson and Archie Goodwin, who penned the majority of the stories. "I wrote two stories and they were ideas swiped from everywhere," Williamson said with a hearty laugh. "Nothing's original anymore."

Williamson drew issues #1, 4 and 5, patterning his style after *Flash Gordon* creator Alex Raymond. Although his style resembled Raymond's Williamson also admits to being influenced by Wood, Daniel Vierge, Hal Foster and Joseph Clement Coll. An unfortunate side-effect of this popular work was the brand of being a "Raymond *imitator*," rather than a distinctive artist in his own right.

An interesting sidelight: Williamson won the rare right, at the time, to own his artwork and has his work from *Flash Gordon* #4 and 5. The first issue's artwork was stolen from King Features, but Williamson remains optimistic that it will one day be recovered.

In issue four, Williamson drew a five-page back-up story, featuring another Raymond creation, *Secret Agent X-9*, Phillip Corrigan. His modern version so impressed the syndicate, he was immediately pressed into service on the continuing newspaper feature. From 1967-80, Williamson was the artist on the feature along with writer Goodwin, who had scripted that back-up story. Over the years, Stan Pitt and other artists did a few fill-ins to help out. Finally, in 1980, Williamson and Goodwin turned *Secret Agent Corrigan* over to George Evans who continues with it to this day.

"The syndicate didn't push the strip in the States," Williamson recalls. "The strip did quite well overseas, especially down south. I loved doing that strip although it had its ups and downs."

When Williamson surrendered the strip, Goodwin asked him to illustrate Marvel's comic adaptation of *The Empire Strikes Back*. Goodwin had been writing the comic book version for a while and was hoping to bring his friend back into comic books, yet again. With his longtime assistant, Carlos Garzon, Williamson launched into the adaptation and loved serving in that unceasing battle against the Empire.

Impressed by Williamson's work, Western Publishing asked him to illustrate their adaptation of Dino DeLaurentiis' *Flash Gordon*. Bruce Jones handled the writing chores but Williamson explained, "He had to conform to Western's point-of-view. They've always been a fuddy-duddy company. I think it worked under the circumstances, but we weren't given the script on time and were really rushed. It feels like we're always rushed. I had a love/hate relationship with that movie. I liked the casting of Melody Anderson [Dale] and Brian Blessed [Voltan], otherwise it was awful."

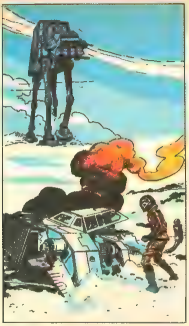
Williamson names Goodwin and Jones as the two best writers he has worked with in his 35-year career. He enjoys their storytelling style and ability to provide clear, concise scripts. In fact, Williamson made time in his busy schedule to draw a story for Jones' new Pacific Comics project, *Alien Worlds*.

The Goodwin/Williamson team had expressed interest in tackling the *Star Wars* strip when it was first conceived in 1978. Two weeks worth of samples were prepared for Lucasfilm Ltd. when they indicated that the strip would begin by adapting the first film. Complications arose and the team didn't get the job.

Nevertheless, George Lucas had been impressed, remembering Williamson's 1966 work on *Flash Gordon*, and wanted him for the *Star Wars* strip. It took a few years but he finally got his wish. And the team got the assignment.

"We try to draw two weeks of daily strips in one week and then sit down and try to do whatever we can on the comic book in the following week we saved for ourselves, but it hasn't worked out that way," Williamson says. "So, we go back and forth. I'll work a certain amount of time on the daily strip and then take two or three days and work like hell on the *Jedi* book and then jump back to the strip."

Working in this somewhat frenzied fashion helped Williamson last year when he did his much-acclaimed adaptation of *Blade Runner*, again with Goodwin. It became a natural to try and squeeze in the time for Marvel's version of *Jedi* although Williamson complains, "There's just no time to do the job properly by the time we get the scripts. It's the third film in a row that this has happened with and I don't know if I'll do any more." In March, Williamson turned back the last 10 pages



FOR AN INSTANT, THERE IS FEAR IN LEIA ORGANA'S EYES— THEN SHE BECOMES THE PRINCESS AND ALLIANCE LEADER AGAIN! COOL—
—PREGNANT.
I GUESS ARITHMUS DIDN'T KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT WOMEN—
SO YOU'RE

ONLY A FULLY TRAINED JEDI KNIGHT WILL CHOOSE WHEN AND WHETHER CHOOSE THE DUSK AND DAWN SWITCH AND YOU'LL BECOME AN AGENT OF EVIL, FLUNDERING IN THE DARKNESS OF HATE AND FEARFUL
YOU ARE THE LAST JEDI, LUKE. BE PATIENT.
BECAUSE I AM AFRAID... I CAN'T, BEN. I CAN'T!

BEN KEPT AND THE STARTLINGLY BEAUTIFUL PRINCESS ORGANA SPECIES OF THE CARBONITE-IMPRISONED SMUGGLER HAN SOLO FROZEN...
...ONLY TO FIND THAT THE APPRENTICE JEDI IS TOO STRONG FOR HIM!
I'VE GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS, YOUNG PADAWAN!

LUKE, I CANNOT PROTECT YOU IF YOU CHOOSE TO FACE VADER... YOU DON'T KNOW USE THE FORCE FOR DEFENSE... YOU DON'T GIVE IN TO HATE, ANGER, FEAR! THAT'S THE WAY TO THE DARK SIDE!
REMEMBER, BEN AND LUKE, YOU ARE ME BACK!

YOU ARE FREE TO USE ANY METHOD NECESSARY! BUT I WANT PRISON... NO INTERROGATION!
PATIENTOO! HOW ABOUT THE PRISONER...LET'S SEE WHAT HIS SECRETS WILL BE...

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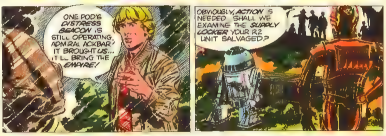
ART © 1983 KING FEATURES SYNDICATE.

On the left are selected details from Williamson's work o led to his getting the comic strip assignment. *Top* is anoth Emperor's royal guard. On the far right is a sample of Wil 1966 *Flash Gordon* comic Williamson drew as a "dream

I SUSPECTED MING WAS HYPNOTIZING US. ONCE I REALIZED HIS WARRIORS WERE IMAGINARY, I FAKED MY DEATH. HOWEVER, THE BIRDMEN BELIEVED WHAT THEY SAW. YOU MIGHT SAY THEY WERE FRIGHTENED TO DEATH!

STAR WARS
Written by ARCHIE GOODWIN
Drawn by AL WILLIAMSON
I HATE THIS PLANET! I'VE BEEN TO SOME OF THE GALAXY'S MANGIEST PESTHOLES
BUT NONE OF 'EM EVER HAD GIANT HORNS THAT ATE MY SNOUT!
YET EATEN...YOUR MILLENNIUM FALCON WAS MERELY HAULED TO THE MUD LAKES. BOTTOM!
ESCAPE POD WHICH CARRIES ME...MY MEN...SUFFERED THE SAME!


ONE POD'S DISTRESS BEACON IS STILL OPERATING, ADMIRAL ACKBAR! IT BROUGHT US... IF L... BRING THE OWNER!
OBVIOUSLY ACTION IS NEEDED. SHALL WE EXAMINE THE SCANTY LOOKER YOUR R2 UNIT SALVAGED?

Meanwhile...
THE RAINS, BECOMING COMPANIED BELOW. BUT CHANCING TO ROOM WE MUST CUT OUR SPEED!
DO IT THEN! BUT DON'T LOSE THAT BEACON!

...the *Empire Strikes Back* adaptation in 1980. This directly...er view inside the Darth Star where Darth Vader meets the...lamson's work on the comic strip. Above is a panel from the...come true."

ART © LUCASFILM LTD

of the adaptation. Fill-in pages were completed by Dave Stevens and William Stout. On *Blade Runner*, Dan Green and Ralph Reese pitched in and helped finish the job.

An interesting connection between *Return of the Jedi* and the strip is the character of General Ak-Bar. He plays such an important role in the new film that Lucasfilm requested that the character be introduced in the comic strip last November. "Archie wrote a long, involved story where Ak-Bar comes in and rescues Han and everyone. There are many new characters in *Jedi* as well as the usual crew," he adds.

Even after 13 years on Secret Agent Corrigan, *Star Wars* still possesses a challenge all its own. "It's completely different," says Williamson, "except that I think Han Solo is looking a bit more like Phil Corrigan lately. I have to work at getting him back to looking like Han Solo. *Star Wars* and Corrigan are two different kinds of strips and I enjoy both. In some ways, though, I prefer something like Corrigan where you can go back and forth because then you can feature fantasy, invention and civilian aspects as well. Whereas in *Star Wars*, it's *Star Wars* all the time. On the other hand, Archie Goodwin has written it so that each story is a little different. It's not just the same thing every time. The only thing that's repetitive is that we must return to the fourth moon of Yavin periodically because that's the rebel home base, but we're doing a story which takes the strip up to events prior to *The Empire Strikes Back*, detailing how the rebels found Hoth and moved their base there."

But although most of Williamson's output for the past three years has been *Star Wars* sagas, each new adventure presents its own inner challenge regarding the creative approach required. "*The Empire Strikes Back* adaptation practically drew itself," he recalls, "but *Jedi* is really rough. A great deal is happening and I guess that, subconsciously, I'm trying to do it a little bit different from *Empire* because I don't want them to look alike and I'm pleased to state that they don't. It's also very different from *Blade Runner* which is good because I hate for the art to look the same all the time. But the final judgment will belong to the fans."

Williamson likes to start working in his studio, just behind his house, around 8 a.m. and will quit close to dinner time. Even though he works on the weekends when necessary, "I try to take some time off because if it's all just work, work, work, that's no good either," he says. "When you work freelance, it's a little rough because the work is with you *all* the time whereas when you punch a time clock, you go home and that's it. But in the long run, I'm still very happy doing what I'm doing and would rather do it that way than go to an office, put on a tie and crap like that."

When working closely with Goodwin, Williamson receives stills, the movie script and thumbnail sketches of the pages with much of the dialogue indicated. Goodwin provides all this material, knowing that Williamson will adapt the sketches to his needs, rejecting one still in favor of another or move the word balloons for better dramatic effect.

He and Garzon have worked together long enough so that their work is truly collaborative. "I lay out, pencil and ink the figures," Williamson outlined. "And sometimes, when the backgrounds are jungles, I ink those, too. What Carlos inks is all the heavy stuff—the machines, the spaceships and certain backgrounds. For *Jedi*, I just drew some scenes on Dagobah and I inked it all myself, and the next sequences involve the forest on Endor and I'll be inking that as well."

After *Return of the Jedi*, Williamson expects to go back to work on the *Star Wars* comic strip and keep it on schedule. He has promised to illustrate another Bruce Jones serial for Pacific Comics; this one entitled *Cliff Hanger*. As always, there are a few artistic surprises up his sleeve. There's little doubt that whatever Al Williamson has planned, readers will be delighted and entertained. ■

James Van Hise recently compiled The Art of Al Williamson, *now available from Pacific Comics. Andrew Mayfair is a New York-based freelance writer.*

Although Williamson found many of Jedi's scenes fun to work on, the forest planet of Endor, above, was a difficult task. Here, the rebel attack on an Imperial bunker meets with defeat.

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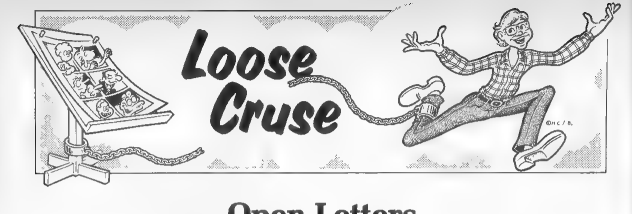

Open Letters

By HOWARD CRUSE

As I compose this, my final Loose Cruse column, I want to examine the impact of comic books on the development of Western Civilization. As the great historian Arnold Toynbee once said . . .

Aargh! What's this drek I'm turning out?

Maybe if I write a letter to Jan, it'll clear my head.

Dear Jan.

I'm beginning to panic. I've drafted three different columns since Thursday and hated all of them the next day.

The first was advice for aspiring comic book artists; it got pontifical fast.

Then, I, tried an autobiographical piece about my brief stint as a (chortle!) *Playboy* regular. But I still need more emotional distance from that bizarre experience. Besides, there's still a chance in a million that *Playboy* might consider publishing me again, particularly once Hugh Hefner retires to a bunny condo in Miami.

Then, I tried leveling with the readers, being a good-ole-boy about it. *Aw hell, folks, so I can't think up an idea for the column this time. I know you'll still be enthralled if I just ramble along about nothing in particular . . .*

It's not my style, unfortunately.

Wish me luck. The deadline looms.

It's me again, Jan!

This morning I woke up in a cold sweat. I dreamed I had signed a lifetime contract to turn out a column every day.

I was right to tell Bob Greenberger I had to pull out after #10. I love being in the spotlight, but these pre-deadline abdominal cramps are beginning to seem life-threatening.

Eddie says I demand too much of myself when I tackle the columns. It's true that it would be a boon to my stomach lining if I could approach the things more casually.

It's my old insecurity syndromes that make me feel awkward. I'm rapping in public to strangers, and I'm not sure what they expect of me. Hence: compulsive overcompensation. Ask my therapist.

Clearing the cobwebs of the mind through some correspondence.

In contrast, I do fairly well in a comics convention setting, because there my role in relationship to others is more defined. I'm a professional cartoonist. It says so on my name tag. The people I encounter generally fall into a few straightforward categories. Some are simply comic book fans, perhaps collectors; some are aspiring artists as well. Then, there are the other pro artists and writers like me. In each of those categories, there will be some who like my work, some who hate it, and plenty who are indifferent to it.

Talking to people face-to-face, I can usually sense by their words, inflections and body language where they rate me on the scale of genius-to-jerk. Someone who tells me that he or she lives for my every creative gem will generate a different conversational ambience than will someone who informs me that my comics make him or her throw up. The direct input I receive gives me a framework for relating.

Writing columns for invisible legions of COMICS SCENE fans, on the other hand, is unnerving. I can't see faces or react to gestures. A few comments pop up on the letters page, but who knows how representative the opinions are? And it's hard to react constructively to the Get-rid-of-Loose-Cruse contingent.

Years ago whenever I started a new 9-to-5 job, I'd always play it quiet for a while, keeping my mouth shut until I had sorted out the office personalities and politics. My co-workers never dreamed what a gab-face I was gonna become once I got the lay of the land!

But somehow I've found it hard to relax in the Loose Cruse setting, the title of the column notwithstanding. *Who are these people I'm writing for?* I keep wondering. *Do they share any of my values? Do they really care what I have to say, or do they view my pages as wasted space capriciously hijacked from the familiar trade routes of the Marvel and DC Universes?*

Dear Fred.

Little progress with Loose Cruse since our phone conversation.

Y'know, when Howard Zimmerman asked me to write a regular column, I thought, *Hey, that sounds easy! Who doesn't like to spout off? I've been drawing comics for a decade; I ought to have lots to say about them!*

What I didn't reckon with was this: the average thought a person entertains about his or her profession doesn't merit a 2500-word essay. Observations come and go, some of them worth preserving, some not. Many will only have meaning to other pros who know what it is to have their economic survival linked to the half-drawn pages of comic art that smirk at them from their drawing tables.

Furthermore, I doubt that many of my colleagues crave commentary from Howard Cruse. It's obvious that I would never be able to stay afloat in their hyper-drive publishing world. And by now, they surely know that the superhero-glutted comics that the fans demand of them and that most of them say they enjoy producing are a spectrum away from the kind of comics I find exciting.

I hope they're not kidding, that they really do enjoy the comics they're creating.

Mr. Cruse has been given a free hand to express his thoughts and ideas in any manner he wishes within the scope of this publication. This column does not necessarily represent the editorial views of COMICS SCENE nor our philosophy. The contents is ©1983 by Howard Cruse

Because if any of 'em really want to draw personal, meaningful comics and are simply forced by economic necessity to grind out repetitive chronicles of villain-pummeling vigilantes, then their stomachs must be twisted into pretzels of frustration by the time they lie down at day's end.

Maybe the alternative publishers, if they proliferate, will help the best of the industry's creators to wriggle out of their yokes. I wonder how far they're ready to break, though, from the limited expectations we've all gotten used to.

Dear Jan,

Looking over some old underground comix, I was thinking how needless are most of our obscenity bugaboos. We're truly raised to be afraid of our bodies, or (at least when others are watching) to keep a haughty distance from them like a Park Avenue executive evading a derelict.

Yet how absurd to fence off parts of ourselves with No Trespassing signs. As if everybody didn't share the same crazy sensations of being alive, and enjoy the various body parts that house those sensations.

Trying to write about these things, I thought how bizarre it is that a hair from your scalp can be morally neutral while a pubic hair, in some people's eyes, would be obscene. And there are gradations of social acceptability in between, such as armpit hair and nose hair. Not exactly obscene, but in Questionable Taste!

Even though they're all just strands of protein. Y'know what I mean? Just little strands of protein.

Dear Fred,

Yeah, you're right. That horse I get onto sometimes is a pretty high one.

I didn't mean to cast the drawing of a superhero comic as a moral issue. After all, as a kid I liked Superman and Batman as much as anybody. I remember converting my blue flannel pajamas into a Superman suit and patrolling the neighborhood.

Fantasy is fun. In childhood, it's a vital nutrient; to some degree I guess it always is. I'm not on a campaign to drive superheroes out of the marketplace.

But I can't help lapsing into stridency when I confront the dearth of variety on comic racks.

Dozens of individualized points of view—that's what I loved about underground comix. A wide array of approaches to the art. The UG comix industry is economically shaky—perhaps terminally so. That has nothing to do with the merits of the artists, and as a consumer I feel deprived. There's no reason I shouldn't be able to go into a comics shop and pick up books by Sharon Rudahl, Ted Richards, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Larry Todd—I could take up paragraphs listing artists with personal slants on life that deserve to be showcased.

There's no law keeping them from drawing and many of them still do, but there's little chance for their good work to connect with a public numbed by the superfireworks of the mainstream lines.

Some people say, *That's show biz! That's what the numbers dictate!* I don't agree. There are a lot of baby boom brats like me and older folks, too, who would shell out dough for comics that touched them emotionally and stirred them intellectually. But everybody's got to get their brains out of a rut if we're going to see any changes.

Hey, how did I get up on this horse again?

Dear Nancy,

When I started Loose Cruse, I figured I'd include anecdotes about my daily life as a cartoonist.

Then, I started looking at my cartooning life and it wasn't very anecdotal. What's to tell about sitting at a drawing board scratching pictures onto oversized paper? I can describe the action, but I can't come up with a punchline.

Cartoonist Profiles runs lots of nostalgia pieces about the wild, wacky cartoonists of yore. The most outrageous exploit you're likely to see from my artist friends is thinking dirty thoughts about work-for-hire contracts.

And do I dare spill the beans about the few crazies I do run into in the publishing world? I may need those very individuals to authorize my paycheck next month. If I ever told COMICS SCENE's readers what Howard Zimmerman did at the office picnic with that chimpanzee and the Jello-filled aquarium, I would never get to illustrate a David Gerrold STARLOG column again!

Dear Ben,

I'm bemused and relieved that most of the response to my Air Pirates/parody series has been positive. I'm fond of it myself, now that it has settled benignly onto its printed pages and is no longer an expositional monster snarling at me from my typewriter carriage.

I wonder what the readers would have thought if they had seen me in February '82 as I retreated glumly to a cold park bench upon realizing that I still needed to cut six pages from part two. I felt as black as the jagged trees around me, sure that I was destined to be ridden out of town on a rail for impersonating a historian.

Trying to tell the Air Pirates' story gave me a renewed appreciation for authors who can write confidently about places they've never been, people they've never shaken hands with, and the principles and motives that cause singular events to happen. It was unsettling to watch myself chopping away subtle, humanizing details and pertinent interview quotes, wondering if I was slicing off important content as well. Had I really gotten the story? What about the facts I wasn't smart enough to locate, the explanations I didn't think to ask for?

The neatest thing about chasing down the Air Pirates story was poring over those two-ton books in the New York Law Library—a place whose threshold I never would have expected to cross. There I was: a hotshot journalist in pursuit of the facts! You should have seen the funny look I got from the librarian who had to certify my credentials. "You say you're writing an article for something called . . . COMICS SCENE? As in . . . *comic books?*"

I imagined her toe inching toward the secret button which would fling open the trap door on which I was standing and eject me ingloriously onto the street.

Dear Jan,

Well, I give up. This being the last column, I had hoped I could write an essay that more or less summed up where I've been coming from in the series, giving an overview of my feelings about comics. But, I'm getting desperate now and time has run out.

So, I'm just going to patch together parts of a bunch of letters I've written that have something or other to do with cartooning and call that motley assemblage the column. A frantic ending to a dubious enterprise.

I mean, what can Greenberger do? Fire me?

Dear Nancy,

What I've learned about myself from writing the 10 Loose Cruse columns is that I don't have the huge drive to talk about cartooning that I thought I had. Oh sure, every now and then a new insight on the comics craft will strike me, or an artist friend will express an unusual slant on the art form that deserves to be shared more widely. Those are the occasions when it's convenient to have my ready-made podium

reserved at COMICS SCENE.

But the surprise for me was learning that—despite the large role that cartooning plays in my life—I don't spend that much time meditating on the craft itself. Nor am I an industrious student of all the books that show up in the marketplace. I catch a sampling of them, but I miss far more. Some of the cavalier generalizations I make are probably unfair.

An interviewer some years ago started quizzing John Lennon about how he would rate the new bands then arriving on the scene. Lennon admitted that he was unfamiliar with most of them. He said something along the lines of: *Either you listen to music or you make music.*

You don't have to be an artist of Lennon's stature to know what he meant.

If I were a thorough student of comics, I would be checking out all the good stuff that is being drawn and published today, both in America and overseas. Even more than that, I would be checking out the great stuff from comics history, the wonderfully funny and fantastic old strips easily put the lie to people who think comics begin and end with guys flying around in leotards.

Unfortunately, my life tends to be one long struggle to find time to say the things I want to say, wrestling instinctively, often awkwardly, with the challenges of my own comic strip panels. The question has to be asked: Who am I to lecture anybody else about comics when I don't have time to educate myself?

So, with all due regard for the fun of talking shop, cartooning for me is mainly a tool which permits me to communicate my thoughts about other things, the things I think are *important* in life. How people relate to each other. How they relate to nature, to politics and power, to God or their perception that God is a myth. What people do with the anger in their lives. What gives them the courage to love in spite of their fears.

Comics excite me because they're still a wide open frontier when it comes to exploring the significant issues of adulthood. They're fun, a mixture of images and words that flows naturally into the human brain through several doors at once. Unlike a movie, comics are right there in your hand, each frame waiting to be contemplated for as long as you like, while the following frame waits patiently to send your mind on a new trip, taking a story or thought one step further toward a destination that can be frivolous or profound.

When I hear the philistines claiming, "Hey, comics are just entertainment, not a real art form," I want to dash onto the street and yell into a bullhorn: "It's not true! Comics can be much, much more!"

But as long as consumers keep channeling their money toward the shallowest products, then the comics-are-just-escapist-entertainment hucksters might as well be correct, because those are the only kind of comics that any publisher is going to be motivated to print. ■

COMING IN STARLOG #71

Luke Skywalker. Han Solo. Princess Leia. And friends. And enemies. They're all back for *Return of the Jedi* as STARLOG gives you an exclusive, incredible peek at this latest *Star Wars* saga: never-before-published *color* photos! A bonus gatefold poster displaying an exciting *Jedi* scene! And more-than-a-few words with Star Warrior Carrie Fisher plus *Jedi* director Richard Marquand on his months behind the camera for the incredible *Return of the Jedi*.

That's only the beginning of this science-fiction summer. STARLOG sits in as other fantasy makers discuss their upcoming blockbusters. Director Jack Clayton outlines the shape of Evil as *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Screenwriter Dan O'Bannon takes a hard-hitting view of the high-speed chopper flight, *Blue Thunder*, and his battles with *ALIEN*. And a double dossier on the two new 007 epics as producer Jack Schwartzman reveals the legal difficulties in getting Sean Connery reassigned to Her Majesty's Secret Service for *Never Say Never Again* and we visit the set of *Octopussy*, the spectacular secret agent mission starring Roger Moore as James Bond. They've both earned a license to kill—and we'll watch the screen explode this summer.

Plus: Ed Naha hits the *L.A. Offbeat* alongside The King of the Bs, Roger Corman . . . David Gerrold soars with thoughts of heroism . . . a look at the future *Space-Age Games* with new columnist Lenny Kaye . . . and a spotlight on Judson Scott of *The Phoenix* and *Star Trek II*. Take off with us as we launch this SF summer with a special *72-page* issue **ON SALE THURSDAY, MAY 5, 1983.**

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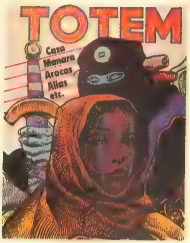
The Italian Difference

By HOWARD SIMPSON



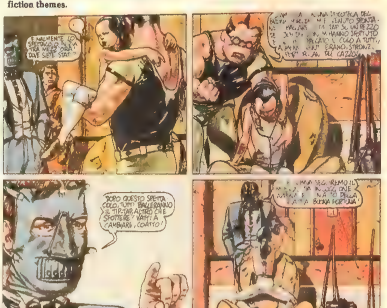
The Italians are currently in the midst of an exciting period of growth and output in the field of comics-fumetti, as comic books are known there. Quite a few publications have appeared recently that suggest a vitality that may continue unabated for years to come. While it's difficult, as an outsider, to pinpoint the source or circumstances responsible for generating this current stage of creativity, it's not hard to liken it to a small-scale Renaissance.

Most of the Italian comics won't be immediately noticeable to Americans newly arrived to that part of the world. Not only do the sizes and formats differ from America, but the covers blend in with other newsstand magazines. There's nothing on the newsstand printed on the "tissue" paper used for comics here. It's only after careful scrutiny that an odd cover here and there, plus a little knowledge of the language reveals the difference. The fumetti have no compunctions about appealing to the soft-core, erotic side of its audience, which is both male and female. The stories also feature tactfully done "adult" situations in fumetti basically geared for adolescents. Violence occurs in a reasonably realistic manner without being particularly bloody. All fumetti aren't looked down upon as being for children. The only ones that seemed aimed at the Archie and Richie Rich audience are the Italian translations of American and Japanese comics with that crowd in mind.

It's interesting to see the American superheroes and comic strip characters translated into Italian. Quite often, the stories appear long after their American debut and are broken up in shorter formats so continued stories can run a long time.

Howard Simpson is an aspiring New Jersey-based artist who spent nine months studying in Italy during 1982. We asked him for an American's impression of the Italian comics scene and he brought back a wealth of information and graphics. Look for some of his work to appear in Tales of the Green Lantern Corps.

The comics of Italy come in all shapes and sizes, for all age groups. *Totem* **feature Italian versions of French material. Below, a page from one of the adult stories using science-fiction themes.**



Some of the characters have modified color schemes—Spider-Man, for example, has yellow eyes rather than white. Among the more popular characters in Italy is The Phantom, who has been a staple of Italian comics for years.

Quite a few British comic strips pop up with some frequency in Italy. The most interesting appearance is Modesty Blaise, a staple of Skorpio. Her adventures are structured for the comic page and are often in color.

UN MOVIMENTO RAPIDO E LE PO-TREBBE COSTARE LA VITA!
UN'OPERAZIONE CHE SI RIPETE.
PASSAMENE UN ALTRO, WILLIE
FIP
SKORPIO
AHHH!
GIUSTO, WILLIE... QUE-WEZO TRANQUETTO!
DUE COLPI AL...
HMM... DEVONO ESSERE STATI CHE HANNO FATTO PARLARE PER TURNER
HANNO SAPUTO CHE IL MI... COMPRO E NEL CASO CHE LA MIA IDENTITA' TRAVESTITA DA NORMANNI INSOSPETTI SO.

England's own Modesty Blaise appears in *Skorpio* weekly.

There is a great difference in attitude towards comics in Italy from that in the states. There is a surprisingly wide level of acceptance of fumetti as a normal part of society. Everyone reads fumetti, from beautiful ladies to lecherous men. This wide appeal could be in part the result of the fact that the fumetti tackle all imaginable genre . . . and then some. Stories about the American West are big favorites. Actually, throughout Europe there appears to be a great fascination with westerns.

Most fumetti are advertised in magazines and on posters just like any other newsstand publication. The respect and appreciation for the two-dimensional characters continues to spill over into the physical environment. Stickers are proudly displayed on numerous motor vehicles' windows of such characters as Snoopy (especially in his Joe Cool identity) and animated characters like Mickey Mouse and the Pink Panther. Strangely, it's only the American or Japanese creations that get this type of exposure. The Italians lack an equivalent character with the popular impact of a Superman. The nearest Italy comes to a national hero is Pinocchio, who has appeared in every medium available to modern society.

The high appreciation level accounts for the differences in the availability of fumetti. They command a generous portion of the newsstand space and in bookstores, they are very prominently displayed. Back issues are readily available at the markets. Basically, there is no need for the type of comic specialty shops like those now becoming popular in America. In Rome, there is something bearing a resemblance to a speciality shop called the Comics Library. The Library carries an international selection of comics in French, Spanish, English, as well as Italian. The operation is run by a son, with help from his father, from a spare room in their backyard. They also carry assorted comics-related paraphernalia, posters, toys, stickers, etc.

Just as there are numerous publishers, there are a variety of formats, which are a challenge to place in clear cut classifications. In order to give an idea of the formats, these designations have been chosen for the purposes of this article: pocket/digest size, magazine size, and multiformat. There are no equivalents to the familiar 32-page comic format. The Italian editions of American comics only superficially resemble their original state. In most cases, they're smaller and in black and white on much better paper. Some publishers wrap their comics in plastic—a plus for collectors.

The pocket/digest size category covers five different sets of dimensions and three different paper stocks. The following titles are aimed at a young audience and feature a variety of adventure: *Tex, Zagor, Mister No, Ken Parker, The Little Ranger (Il Piccolo Ranger)*, and *Martin Mystere*, just to name a few. The only costumed hero is *Diabolik*, who resembles the Phantom, yet his adventures occur in the city. The Italians are very casual about giving credit, often the contents page lists only the last name and lacking a contents page, unless the artist or artist/writer signs his work, it remains unknown. If the publisher is using the artist as a selling point, then the name may be included on the first page of the feature.

Diabolik is credited to A. ei.. Giussani. There's also *Stormtrooper* by Bonvi, a humorous look at German soldiers during World War II, which has various companion titles. All of the titles have color covers and black and white on the one hundred-plus interior pages. Ads are neatly collected in the back so as not to interrupt the one story that runs each issue. It's not uncommon for the title character to be absent from the cover. There are two different sizes within this group: 4¾" by 6¾" for 40¢ and 6" by 8½" for 50¢. The exchange rate constantly fluctuated during my stay, but it approximately averaged out to $1.00 being equal to Lire 1,180.

Also with the same size, format, and prices are what could easily be called pornographic comics. Some of the covers have excellently rendered paintings, far above the quality of the art inside, which is generally poor. The titles, even without being translated, give an idea of the genres encompassed, such as crime: *Mafia, La Polizotta, Crime, Bounie*, horror: *Vam-*

pirissimo, Oltreromba, Terror, Macabro, and *Lucifero.* There are different levels of explicitness and usually the more explicit the less the pretense at drawing. *Lolita, Pussycat,* and *Vampira* are among those that are very explicit. Who knows how often they are published? The stands are always full of them and there are often different issues of the same title on sale at the same time.

Another book aimed at a more literate audience is called *Linus.* A monthly, it measures in at 6" by 8¼" and packs 150 pages with articles ranging from archeology to fantasy to video games, short stories, and a collection of weekly comics strips such as *Peanuts, Doonesbury, Beetle Baily, Crock,* and *Wizard of Id.* Jules Feiffer's strip gets two pages, a comic strip from England [*Brixton* by Frank Dickens] is also presented, and *Valentina* appears on a single page courtesy of Guido Crepax. There are also various spot illustrations and one page gags throughout the book. The rest of the book is filled with work by Italian cartoonists. There are also a few continuing strips running about six to eight pages long: *The Triumphant Virginity (La Verginita Trionfante)* by Enzo Lunari is a strip with high intellectual pretensions; *Bobo* by Sergio Staino is done in a style reminiscent of Feiffer and deals with interactions between people and Orge King (Orco Re) by Lagana and Queirolo. This eight-page installment is the only strip in the book in color and is downright weird. There is no American equivalent I can compare it to, though it does remind me of the madness in *Alice in Wonderland.* Before moving on, it's necessary to mention that Lagana is the artist on the strip. In Italy, when two people are named, the artist gets first position on the credit line.

The next few titles can almost be seen as a bridge between the pocket-digest size books and the magazine size. The dimensions are slightly larger—8¼" by 9¼"—but small enough to carry in a coat pocket. They are printed weekly with glossy magazine covers and pages. These miniature magazines contain feature articles with color and black and white photos as well as six or seven fumetti per issue. The strips can run in black and white, but some use a few pages of color. The color is fine, but is oddly spaced throughout the story. The stories are generally 13 to 16 pages in length and along with the articles make up a pleasent 120 page package for only 50¢! Of course, the contents of some of these weeklies make one wonder if they're worth the paper they're printed on, but once you become familiar with the books it's easy to avoid the material of poor quality. The title seemed to be aimed at the same type of teen-age audience that buys *Teen-Beat* and magazines of that ilk here.

From an American viewpoint, I have trouble considering the Italian comics part of throwaway culture. The better paper, higher production values, and the ability to buy books sold with a protective plastic

This lady is a vampire and a heroine with overtones of horror and the supernatural.

wrap are enough to give the collectors in the marketplace multiple orgasms. However, I saw no evidence of back issues being pushed up to ridiculously high prices (as the presence of collectors have a habit of causing). In the markets, back issues usually sold for cover price or less. Also, *Lancio Story* and its sister publication *Skorpio* put out reprints every month of the weekly issues published during that time for 90¢. Considering the price of a single book is 50¢, it would be advantageous to wait a month.

The weeklies are all anthology titles which have single stories and same series running for several weeks before being replaced by another. Most of the series could be interchangeable among the books. Though the books may be targeted at a specific audience, the strips don't necessarily reflect the same intentions as the feature articles. *Albo* and *Blizz* seem to be for a general teen audience, *Addino* presents boy/girl romances, *Boy Music* shows *Friends* in different adventures. The following stand out quality-wise from the few weeklies mentioned: *Lancio Story* is totally fumetti and has the same publisher as *Skorpio*, which from the scantily clad females on the cover and teasing stages of undress that accompany the feature articles, suggest this is definitely grabbing a male audience; *Intrepido* has feature articles on sports personalities; *Il Monello* goes for those eager to read about movie and television personalities. The last three titles always feature color photographs on the cover with a blurb to let the reader know fumetti are inside.

In the magazine category, *Frigidaire* and some of the others are fairly new arrivals to the Italian scene. *Alter,* however, has been around for nine years and recently underwent a format change. With the January 1982 issue, it began to have text features, yet instead of moving out any of the fumetti, the number of pages was expanded from 84 to 100 pages (counting the covers). The previous year did include some kind of science fiction/fantasy appendix listing and expounding on various terminology and giving the names of authors and their works. The 13th issue is called a supplement, but it doesn't reprint anything from the previous year, it does have an expanded page count and included a collection of photo montages by Carlo Moggia which are downright weird.

funny, grotesque, fascinating, perplexing, and beautiful — usually all at the same time! The montages had been presented on the back covers, but disappeared completely during '82 to be replaced by useless enlargements of interior panels from the current issue, which has always been the case on the front covers.

Alter also has a surprising diversity of art styles appearing in each issue; the New Wave style presented by Riccardo Buroni and Ugo Bertotti in their strip, Marlowskitz, the Detective; the rich and colorful slapstick in Furos Orlando by Marco Scalia and Silverio Pisu; the well-designed black and white adventures of Petra by Attilio Micheluzzi and the highly stylized work of Lorezno Mattotti, which recalls the German expressionistic style of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. There is also non-Italian work appearing here, like that of Richard Corben, Tardi and Manchette.

There is also a lot of work that appears with what seems a common European occurrence—beautiful art and incomprehensible story. The stories in *Frigidaire* seem to attempt to explore the potentials of medium and the nature of experimentation in comics tends to lead to some unusual results. In such cases, lack of clarity of idea may be excusable, but in situations where the attempt seems to be nothing beyond the straight forward story telling techniques already established, then one can easily condemn a story by saying, "Good art, couldn't understand the story, though."

Frigidaire **is one of the brightest spots on the Italian newsstand. The accompanying panel is just one example.**

Totem features material pulled from the pages of the French *Circus* and *Metal Hurlant*. Cas, Moebius, Manara, Benoit, Cherqui, Alexis, Lauzier, Renard, Dominique He, Dionnet, and Gal are just a few whose work comprise the bulk of material in this 100-page publication. For variety work by Angus McKie and Luis Garcia has been translated for its new audience.

The Italian *Metal Hurlant*'s non-text features are completely derived from the orignal French title. The appearance of the *Heavy Metal* movie did allow for one issue to feature the stories used in the film. Aside from that excursion into American material, Moebius is joined by Druillet, Clerc, Chaland, Shuiten and others here.

Within months of *Metal Hurlant*'s appearance, a new publication was on the stands — the Italian edition of the French *Pilote*—*Pilot*. *Pilot* translated the word of Christin. Bilal, Manara, Riberia, Franc, Tantempion, Lauzeir and Mezeires.

L'Eternauta came as a breath of fresh air upon its arrival soon after *Pilot*. Finally, a return of sorts to the local talent. As with the weeklies, there a generous portion of international talent, like that of Altuna, Succomano, Trillo, Trigs, and Zanotto from South America, Fernandez of Spain and Fusne of France. A series of Hugo Pratt begins in the premier issue featuring *The Youth of Corto Maltese*. On the contents page Corto Maltese is billed as "the most beloved character by comics fans" which may not be all hype. Books dedicated to Corto and articles in magazines tend to lend weight to the claim. Pratt's style is idealy suited to comics, it's clear and concise, saying what's necessary with a few lines, rather than a hundred.

L'Eternauta turns out to be the best buy of the newsstand due to the better balance between story and art, so that all the stories are worth reading each issue. But there's such a wealth of other material that it's not necessary to settle for just what's in the weekly and monthly publications. There are varous books floating about that cover anything, like the illustrated story of the Italian military effort during World War II. It was surprisingly good reading. The script is credited to Dino De Rugerlis with art by Curt Caesar on the third $1.20 volume in the the series. It doesn't take much effort to find something different from the usual newsstand publication.

The reason it wouldn't take any extra effort is because there doesn't seem to be any preconceived idea of what can appear in comics. The super heroes haven't taken over. The long underwear types—though ideal for comics — haven't become so closely connected with the medium that anything else is considered new, daring, and adult or whatever euphemism American publishers tend to use in order to say "Hey, this isn't just comics!"

The current activity in Italy makes it worth checking back on in a few years. ■

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LIGHT YEARS AHEAD

Reporter

(Continued from page 17)

trated by Al Williamson, with the fast pace and cliff-hanging excitement of the old movie serials.

Warren's inventory of material has been thoroughly scrutinized by Pacific. Three titles have resulted: *Master of the Macabre*, reprinting the Berni Wrightson stories; *World of Wood* featuring the universe of the late Wally Wood and coming in June, *Quest. . . and Other Tales* by Jeff Jones. All are standard $1 Mando books.

CAPITAL PUBLICATIONS

The color Nexus #1 was finally released in late March and has subsequently struggled to return to a bi-monthly schedule. The delay was caused by colorist George Freeman. Editor Richard Bruning is turning coloring chores over to Wisconsin artist Les Dorscheid.

Badger #1 will premiere this summer with a Steve Rude cover and an introductory 30-page tale by Mike Baron and Jeff Butler. Dorscheid is also slated to color this series, which has been in the planning stages for months.

Due out this fall is *Whisper*, written by Steve Grant and drawn by Rich Larson. This title is Capital's attempt to produce something fresh and different, rather than relying on science fiction (Nexus) or superheroes (Badger).

ART © 1983 FANTAGRAPHICS

Pacific Comics' latest heroine, depicted by Brent Anderson.

FANTAGRAPHICS

Publisher Gary Groth reports plans are proceeding to launch the first issue of *Dalgoda* this summer. To insure an untroubled publishing frequency, the Jan Strnad/Dennis Fujitake series will have at least two issues completed before being scheduled and released.

Plans are also underway for a second graphic novel featuring *The Survivors*. The first, *Talon of Blood*, was successful enough to encourage a follow-up.

Neuro #1 and *Love and Rockets* #2 emerged in April with subsequent issues in production. *Neuro* #2 spotlights four-color legends Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, represented with both an interview and a never-before-seen *Superman* story, from 1934.

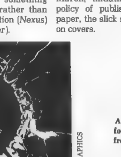
FANTAGOR PRESS

Richard Corben's publishing company is alive and well in Kansas City, Missouri. With *Jeremy Brood* out, Corben is concentrating on other activities. Brood will return in a 16-page color section in a new magazine tentatively titled *Fanagor Presents*. The two *Jeremy Brood* albums originally planned, however, will not appear.

Mutant World, the series written by Strnad and Corben, and originally published in Warren's 1984, will be assembled in a single volume later this year. According to Strnad, the Warren version had altered dialogue. The new edition will restore the original text. Eight new pages have been added to the story, smoothing over the chapter interruptions. Corben has painted a new cover.

AC COMICS

Americomics #1 saw print in March, initiating the company policy of publishing on Hudson paper, the slick stock usually used on covers.



ART © 1983 FANTAGRAPHICS

A page from the forthcoming *Dalgoda*, from Fantagraphics.

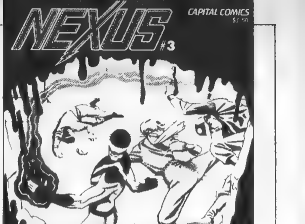
For the moment, it appears that DC Comics has not completed its negotiations with Charlton to purchase rights to the company superheroes from the late '60s, so *Americomics* plans to continue publishing the adventures of Blue Beetle, Captain Atom and Nightshade. The trio will team-up with The Question as Sentinels of Justice in *Americomics Special* #1, which goes on sale in June. Newcomer Greg Guler illustrated the story.

FICTIONEERS BOOKS

David Anthony Kraft's *Comics Interview* has been so well received that Kraft has chosen to go monthly after the second issue. Issue three previews the *Killraven* graphic novel by Don McGregor and P. Craig Russell. In issue four, Jim Starlin discusses his work on *Dreadstar* while Klaus Janson, Jim Salicrup and Dick Giordano engage in a round-table talk.

COMICO

Primer #3 will appear *without* the Mike Hernandez story we mentioned last issue. Andrew Murphy, however, has provided a Victor story for the lead feature. The first issue of Skrog. *Grendel, Az* and *Slaughterman* all debuted in April; second editions are slated for May or June release. According to the company, the line has been well-received. They do plan to make changes to improve packaging.



ART © 1983 CAPITAL COMICS

Look Sal, the situation is obvious. Somehow this dropping has, at some point, become SOP.
Nothing has changed. Nothing is going to change at all. I can produce as many or as few as I want. I can produce as many or as few as I want. I can produce as many or as few as I want

cluding this year's *Just Imagine* #4. Regardless of what we told you, Foglio is working on a new Godot tale for the color volume which Starblaze hopes to publish by year's end

By the way, Foglio and partner Preff were elated to see *D'Arc Tangent* #1 premiere in March. Originally planned for last summer, the black and white science-fiction series was delayed, due to editorial tinkering and the expansion of the story from 40 to 46 pages. Work on issue two has been underway for several months. They pray to have the next issue out in June.

C.I. ENTERPRISES

J.R. Riley, publisher of Comics Informer Enterprises, announced in late March the temporary suspension of his fanzine, *Comics Informer* with issue seven. After a redesign, volume two, number one will premiere in September. *CI* will become a 64-page comic book-sized monthly for $1.95. Rather than concentrate on news, *CI* will preview upcoming comics projects and feature major interviews with production personnel including letterers and colorists. The comic strip section, now reduced to 10 pages, will continue to spotlight new talents.

Meanwhile, Riley reports that he has licensed the *Justice Machine* and *The Elementals* from Nobel Comics. His first edition will be the long-delayed *Justice Machine Annual*, now set for a June 15 release. Following in July is *The Elementals*, a new set of superheroes written and edited by Michael Wolff and drawn by Bill Willingham. In August, the *Justice Machine* returns with a new look and direction courtesy of editor Wolff, writer Bill Loebs and artists Bill Reinhold and Jeff Diehl. Both bi-monthlies will appear in the Mando style used by Pacific Comics

A page from the Buck Godot strip appearing in *Just Imagine* #4. See, he's not a happy-go-lucky rabbit.

ART © 1983 PHIL FOGLIO

TITAN BOOKS

Coming in late July will be the first issue of *Judge Dredd*, an American edition of the English comic serial. The monthly comic will be in the standard 32-page, Mando package for $1. Brian Bolland will be doing at least the first three covers and issues one through four will feature his work Those stories will also be scripted by John Wagner and originally saw print in England's *2000 A.D.* comic.

Editor Nick Landau says it's high time the Judge journied to America in a mass market format. So far, only limited edition albums have been available in the United States over the last two years. "I think everyone is going to be really happy with the comics," Landau adds. "I look at the artwork and I'm stunned by it. It's some really beautiful work by Brian "

For more on Judge Dredd, see COMICS SCENE #2.

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Wt. 160 lbs.
Str. 14
End. 13
Agil., 12
Int., 14
Chsr 11
Dam Mod. +1
Acc, +1
Hit Pts. 9
Heal 1.2
Cer. Cap.: 328
Basic HTH 1d6
Power 53
Movement 39"
Det. Hidden 10%
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Focus

Mike Hernandez

While it takes many would-be writers and artists a year or more to earn a regular feature at either DC or Marvel, newcomer Mike Hernandez accomplished that goal a little easier. After moving to New York in March 1982, Hernandez sold ideas and stories to Marvel until landing a regular DC assignment pencilling *The Huntress* just before Christmas. Then, shortly after the new year, Eclipse publisher Dean Mullaney gave Hernandez the pencilling assignment on Doug Moench's new series, *Aztec Ace*.

The road to comicdom wasn't especially difficult for the tall, thin 23-year-old artist, just time-consuming. But the years spent developing his talent have paid off nicely. Born in Chicago, he grew up, literally, on the road thanks to his father's work as an engineer. He was also exposed to Europe's art museums at an early age.

One other thing Hernandez picked up from his days in Europe, was an appreciation for movies. "It's cold over there," he says in a soft, pleasant voice, "so we spent a lot of time indoors, watching movies." To this day, the cinema holds the same fascination for Hernandez. Films and film techniques helped shape his storytelling style. "Many of these second generation artists are ripping off Steranko without understanding *why* Steranko did the things he did. They don't understand the logic behind the cinematic technique, how the camera moves and why you go from an establishing shot to a close-up," he complains.

Once back in America, Hernandez spent 12 years in Washington, D.C. and attended the Duke Ellington School of the Arts where he continued to refine his abilities. "I developed an appreciation for the classical school of artists, the ones at the beginning of the century like N.C. Wyeth and Arthur Rackham. It may not show in my work yet," he laughs, "but it's there."

After school, Hernandez worked for a local theater as a manager. Each time he gathered together enough money—about every six months — he journeyed to New York to show Marvel his work. On his first trip, encouragement came from then-editor Al Milgrom. Back in D.C., he continued to fill his free time working solely on art, getting better and better.

Finally, on Good Friday of 1982, Jim Shooter felt Hernandez had improved enough to be given a script. He took home a Falcon story and "I totally flubbed the job." At roughly the same time, *X-Men* inker Bob Wiacek told Hernandez he might be able to use him as a background inker, since his regular background man, Rick Bryant (see COMIC SCENE #6), was not always available. Hernandez moved to New York and began seeking regular work from Marvel and later DC.

The young artist developed an idea for an eight-page Shanna the She-Devil story for *Ka-Zar*, which Danny Fingeroth bought. The story remains plotted and pencilled but has not yet been finished by anyone. Meanwhile, Hernandez also sold the plot and pencils for an eight-page science-fiction story to Ernie Colon for DC's *New Talent Showcase*. The story will be scripted by Mindy McAdams and has been inked by Bryant. Hernandez was on his way.

A funny thing happened on the way to a regular paycheck. He was assigned a fill-in *Moon Knight* tale, written by Steve Rigenberg, and had begun working on it slowly. At the DC Christmas party, editor Denny O'Neil announced the story was scheduled and due in less than a week. Hernandez was trapped by the deadline since he had been doing audition sketches of *The Huntress* for Colon, hoping to win the penciller's slot on that back-up series. Hernandez rushed through the *Moon Knight* story and made the deadline, though he was less than thrilled with the finished results when newcomer Kevin Dzuban turned in the inks. It was some Christmas. At the same party, Hernandez was presented with the *Huntress* assignment by Colon and met Bryant. A new team was born.

"Ernie has faith in me and wants me to stay on the series," Hernandez says happily. After pencilling three installments, the first episode of which is on sale now, Hernandez sat down with colon and series scripter Joey Cavaleri to discuss their vision of the character and the direction the series will take. With a new permanent team on the feature, talk has already begun about making *The Huntress* a mini-series or a regular series.

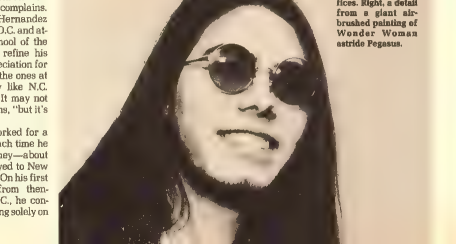
"To me," he explains, "The Huntress is a creature of the night. Her parents were Batman and The Catwoman so she would have learned how to operate that way. She should be battling bizarre villains, sort of the kind Spider-Man originally battled. Wonder Woman can carry the romance in the front of the comic, The Huntress should battle the bizarre criminals."

Hernandez feels that DC is the place to work these days because the top management is filled with creative people who are interested in making the line of comics visually exciting and worthwhile reading. "Artists are the ones who engineer the look of the books at DC," he states. "At Marvel, the editorial ranks are filled with lots of former fans."

Last Thanksgiving, Hernandez showed his work to Eclipse's Mullaney who thought the young artist would be ideally suited for Doug Moench's new title. The prolific writer liked the samples he saw, and in January, Hernandez spent a weekend at Moench's Pennsylvania home, getting to know the writer and the new time-travelling character. Hernandez speaks excitedly about the series, set to premiere this summer. "It's an artist's dream. I can go through the whole spectrum and draw any and everything I want. The book will be visually kinetic and the imagery will be startling," Hernandez promises.

With two regular series, Hernandez is busy enough not to worry about the next assignment. He's taking life easy and looking forward to hearing how the fans react to his material. With a ready smile, Mike Hernandez says, "I just want to get better and better and live my dream of drawing what I want."

—Robert Greenberger



Mike Hernandez on a recent visit to the COMICS SCENE offices. Right, a detail from a giant airbrushed painting of Wonder Woman astride Pegasus.

PHOTO: JOEN CLAYTON/WONDER WOMAN® & © 1983 DC COMICS INC.

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TEDDY Q

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Who's on FIRST COMICS

A look at the people behind First Comics and why they are a company to watch

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Comics are a boom industry right now. New comic sales, comic stores and the like have never been stronger," says Mike Gold.

"In an environment where the unemployment rate is more than 11 percent, the economy is absolutely horrible, and people are starving and freezing to death, comic book sales are going up. I almost feel a little guilty about that," he smiles.

The managing editor and co-founder of Chicago-based First Comics has a great deal to smile about. In their first six months of comics publishing, Gold and company have solidly established themselves with five monthly titles, the latest debuting in April. They have lured Howard Chaykin and Frank Brunner back to comics, revived Joe Staton's popular *E-Man*, introduced new talent and properties, and provided new opportunities for pros like Mike Grell and Martin Pasko.

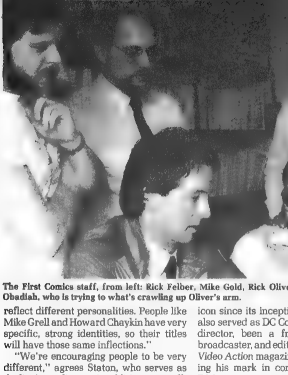
After more than a year-and-a-half of preparation and planning, First Comics released *Warp* last November, followed by *E-Man* in December and *Jon Sable, Freelance* in February. In April, the company assumed the publication reins of *Starslayer* from Pacific Comics (effective with issue seven). Chaykin's *American Flagg* makes its debut under the First logo, come June, with a sixth title, *Mars*, by Mark Hempel and Wheatley, to appear this fall.

"My goal for the company is responsible eccentricity, and the books are pretty well slipping into that image," says Gold. "Since many of the books are specifically done by their creators, they're going to

ALL ART © 1983 FIRST COMICS INC.

Kim Howard Johnson has been following the development of First Comics for us and was last seen in issue six, chatting with Max Allan Collins.

Left: A collection of First's female stars along with mascot Teddy Q. Right: promotional art for their sixth title, coming in September.



The First Comics staff, from left: Rick Felber, Mike Gold, Rick Oliver, Joe Staton and Rick Obadiah, who is trying to what's crawling up Oliver's arm.

reflect different personalities. People like Mike Grell and Howard Chaykin have very specific, strong identities, so their titles will have those same inflections."

"We're encouraging people to be very different," agrees Staton, who serves as the line's art director in addition to penciling *E-Man*. "Encouraging eccentricity."

THREE HEADS & A MIND

In addition to Gold and Staton, the staff at First includes a curious mixture of comics veterans and newcomers to the field. Among the relative newcomers are publisher Rick Obadiah, business manager Rick Felber, and associate editor Rick Oliver.

"You don't have to be named 'Rick' to work here, but it helps," says Gold, known to fans for his work with the Chicago Comicon since its inception in 1975. Gold has also served as DC Comics public relations director, been a freelance writer and broadcaster, and edited the Chicago-based *Video Action* magazine. Staton, after making his mark in comics with Charlton's *E-Man*, went on to both draw and ink various titles for Marvel and DC, where his co-creations include *The Huntress* and *The Omega Men*. Bruce Patterson inks, designs logos, and draws house ads, while serving as production coordinator ("Including the corrections and such—I'm like a janitor for the comics," he says).

"One of our company's strong points is that Rick and I, working with Mike—who has taught us much about the comic book industry—really don't get into, 'This is the way it's been done, and this is the way we must do it'," says Obadiah. "We don't play the 'It's never been done that way before' game.

"Most of our management personnel—with the exception of Mike—have not grown up through the comic book industry. Rick Felber is vice-president of operations in a metal lithography firm. My background is not comic books—which is not to say I don't have a feel for it—but our management practices originate in a whole different set of circumstances. We hope to take from that, and apply it to our new business."

"DC and Marvel have had to live with history, with the practices they have gotten involved in over the years," Gold explains. "They've been doing business in a certain way for more than 20 years. DC and Marvel have had a very hard time dealing with such things as foreign royalties, because they're still using ancient contracts. We have a leg up, being new and well-organized."

The organization officially began in May 1981, though its seeds were sown in two prior events. Obadiah was serving as managing director of the Organic Theater Company's production of the *Warp* stage plays in 1980 when, as a two-way promotion, Gold featured a performance at the Chicago Comicon.

In early 1981, Gold's company distributed a 16-page promotional comic book entitled *Weird Organic Tales in Chicago*. It was done in conjunction with the Organic Theater Company—the group which first brought the *Warp* trilogy to the stage in 1971. Staton drew the book, with Patterson as letterer and colorist.

"First Comics did not exist even as a glimmer in our eyes at the time, but in a very real sense, that book served as a dry run for us," says Gold.

Gold and Obadiah had been discussing ways of translating *Warp* into the comic book format. After rejecting offers from

Wizard of Babel Contest

First Comics, in association with COMICS SCENE, has devised a contest which will truly challenge your wits! Below, you'll see a panel originally published in *Warp* #4, which went on sale in Febuary. The wizard Lugulbanda is reciting a mystic incantation in a foreign language. We want you to translate that incantation and send it to us, before July 1.

The first person to get their post card—via the United States Post Office *only*, folks—to our offices with the correct message will win a ColecoVision home video game system and several game cartridges! All other entries will be deposited in a special cardboard box for the exra-special drawing for first, second and third prizes.

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Grand Prize: A ColecoVision home video game system plus game cartridges.

First Prize: 10 one-year subscriptions to the finest line of First Comics. *Warp*, *E-Man*, *Jan Sable*, *Starslayer*, *American Flagg* and *Mars*.

Second Prize: 10 one-year subscriptions to *Warp*.

Third Prize: 4 one-year subscriptions to COMICS SCENE.

To Enter:

Send us a post card with the mystic translation—and your name, address, zip code, phone number—to First Contest/COMICS SCENE/475 Park Avenue South/New York, NY 10016. Post cards must be received no later than July 1, 1983. All winners will be listed in a future issue of COMICS SCENE and notified by mail. In the event that no one can decipher this rather Warped language, *all* post cards received will be eligible for prizes in a random drawing. *All* prizes will be awarded. Employees of First Comics and COMICS SCENE, and their subsidiary and sister firms and suppliers are ineligible.

A Magical Clue:

This is an existing foreign language and not a code of any kind. Your Captain Midnight decoder ring won't help. Only three members of the First Comics crew, COMICS SCENE editor Robert Greenberger and the wizard Lugulbanda know the answer and they ain't telling!

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THE FIRST ANNUAL SATURN™ SCIENCE FICTION AND COMIC BOOK AWARDS

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The awards themselves are replicas of the planet Saturn which will be inscribed with the names of the winners. The results will be announced at THE FORBIDDEN PLANET INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE FICTION AND COMIC ART CONVENTION Awards Banquet on Saturday, July 2, 1983, at The New York Sheraton.

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THEN DO THE BLACK PANTHER AND HER MYSTERY LOVER!
BECAUSE TO THINK HOW LOW HE'LL SINK TO DISCREDIT T'CHALLA!
I'LL BE BACK SOON AS I DON'T HAVE TO START THE STORY ALL OVER AGAIN!
THE ONE WHO LIVES AND BREATHES ARGHH!
IN THE POSITIVE REINFORCE-MENT SUCH AND THEN, IN THE NEGATIVE, I'LL REVOKE SOME OF THE PRIVILEGES!
SHE'S UNDER THE SPELL OF THAT RACIAL SUPREMACIST HOTEP! WITH ALL MY HEART I WISH I COULD HELP HER, BUT THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO!
I HOPE YOU GUYS HAVE SOMETHING BUT I HOPE YOU DON'T! I'M NOT GOING TO BE ANY SATISFACTION TO READERS WHO ARE EVERYWHERE SPECULATING, THAT'S...
WE ARE YOU GUYS ABOUT WONDER STAND?
GOOD, ANSON! GOODNESS GA GRACIOUS! I'M SORRY, KIDS--BUT MYSELF, ALSO, NOT HAVE THE FOGGIEST IDEA WHO BUILT THE ARMORED PROGRAM! I HAVE NOT ANYBODY!
I'M SURE A CHAMPION OF DEMOCRACY LIKE MR. ALDERMAN'S HAS MANY FRIENDS WHO BUILT THE ARMOR FOR HIM!
ALDERMAN?
JUNGERS! WE'RE ON THE SAME BOAT NOW!
WHO KNOWS AND WHO CARES! WE GOT TO GET ON WITH THE ADVENTURE! THAT'S OUR DIFFERENCE!
YOU DRAW? NAAHH, YOU'RE AN INKER!

A page of Frank Brunner's pencil on *Warp*, the cosmic comic that lured him back to the business.

A sample of *E-Man*'s satire: the controversial two-part X-Men parody by Staton, and Martin Pasko.

DC, Marvel and other publishers, they decided they wanted to do it right—and on their own.

"Initially, First Comics was not going to be putting out a line of comics, but just do *Warp*," says Obadiah. "Then, we realized we needed a little business savvy behind us. Our third partner, Rick Felber, was brought in. He was the one who opened our eyes up by saying, 'Hey, if *Warp* can make it and you're good, then we should make it a line.' That started a whole new process of thinking."

The company began work in earnest, although they did not release their first comic until after 18 months together. *Warp*, they feel, is well-suited to be the four-color cornerstone of the First Comics universe.

"The most surprising thing for me is the receptiveness with which we were greeted," Obadiah says. "Everyone looked at us and said, 'OK, you say you're going to do all these things? We'll sit back and let you do 'em.' Now, we've delivered, and have a track record behind us. We're no longer promisers, we've fulfilled the promises, and hopefully, we are the future.

"I think we set comic book history with *Warp* by actually coming out a week early. The most important thing in our company establishing itself is to be out on the stands when we say we will. Mike and I believe that scheduling is very important," Obadiah says, pointing out one wall of his office, which is covered with schedules for the next six months of production. "One problem other comics companies experience is that nobody sits down and does a month-by-month schedule.

"We have all kinds of royalty plans which are tied into meeting deadlines. That's not to say we're intolerent if you're late, but if you're on time, the company pays you better. I call it an incentive, because it's almost a bonus for doing what you said you would do in the first place."

As production coordinator, Patterson says he realizes the importance of scheduling. "We have to get our books in two or three months early, because we are the low people on the totem pole. We aren't Marvel or DC, we don't have a long history behind us, so we must build good will. The printer has been dealing with Marvel and DC, so they have priority—we must get our books in."

A former neighbor of Staton's, Patterson arrived at First after inking several titles at DC, including the first six issues of *Camelot 3000*. He says his new job has allowed him to diversify, an option which was unavailable to him at DC.

"They wouldn't let me draw or edit. It was, 'You draw? Naahh, you're an inker!' Those companies are quick to pigeon-hole you—you can't do this because you're an inker, you can't do that because you're a letterer. Here, I've been allowed to do more pencilling, some inking, a lot of coloring—I was doing more lettering until I started inking *Warp*—and I even co-write ads."

CHAYKIN'S VIEW OF AMERICA

"There's obviously an interest in starting from square one, in putting out a new kind of product," says Howard Chaykin. "And when you're starting from square one, there's no house style or idea beyond, 'Let's do something interesting and have fun with it.' They're pretty seriously committed.

"I don't think I could have promoted *American Flagg* as a package at Marvel or DC, because it's not about those kind of things Marvel and DC are currently interested in producing. I'm not very comfortable with the idea of superheroes. It's time to latch onto the fact that our audience is staying with us, and getting older, too—so let's get older with them."

Chaykin's *American Flagg*—which he calls "the type of comic book that he would like to read"—debuts in June with a three-part story introducing Reuben Flagg and

(Continued on page 62)

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Preview

Batman & The Outsiders

Batman is fed up. He has always been a loner, concerned more for the fate of the common man rather than intergalactic threats. It makes sense, then, that he quits the Justice League of America when his friend Luchus Fox is kidnapped in the postage-stamp sized country of Markovia and they refuse to help. What Batman didn't expect to find when he arrived in the European nation was a new team, which he would form. That is the set-up for DC's latest newsstand comic, *Batman and the Outsiders*. Although the idea for another team-comic was conceived by Marv Wolfman and Dick Giordano in 1981, it fell to editor Len Wein, writer Mike W. Barr and artist Jim Aparo to make the entire thing work. When it was noticed that *The Brave and the Bold*'s sales had been eroding for years, the comic was given the go-ahead and a preview story appeared in the final issue of *B&B*, in April, and the new monthly followed on the next month.

BATMAN ™ THE OUTSIDERS ™ & © 1984 DC COMICS, INC. USED WITH PERMISSION

I'VE HEARD THE CRIES OF THE PEOPLE... AND I'VE SEEN FIRST-HAND THE FACE OF CRIME AND VIOLENCE!
BLAMM
I SWORE I'D DO EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO PREVENT THOSE DEATHS TO PROTECT INNOCENT LIVES!
AND IF I FAIL TO, I'LL KEEP THAT PROMISE.
NO ENEMIE LIVE IS A LIE!

Geo-Force (left): Barr says he is the prince of Markovia whose half-sister is Terre of the Teen Titans. A crossover story between the two teams will appear in August explaining the relationship. Geo-Force's powers are "more characteristic of the earth itself. He can increase or negate gravity, throw lava blasts, he's the power behind the group." Katana (middle): She's a mysterious female samurai who'd rather fight first and then figure out what's happening. She and Black Lightning will find each other insufferable because of their divergent attitudes. Also, there's some supernatural relationship between Katana and her sword.

Halo: "She's the most mysterious member of the group," Barr states. "She's very open, almost a true innocent. She has a different power for each of the seven colors of the spectrum itself; any of the auras allows her to fly. She's also about 16 years old." Her mysterious background will be explored later in the series.

Barr explains that The Outsiders will be an international group, although Batman brings them to Gotham City to help stop the growing crime problem. He will serve as their teacher and will help Halo establish an identity for herself. In fact, she will attend high school where Jefferson Pierce (Black Lightning) will now be teaching. Halo and Katana will also be moving into the penthouse atop the Wayne Foundation building in Gotham City. The Outsiders will also use the Batcave beneath the building, now that Batman has moved back to the Wayne Mansion and original headquarters.

"At one time, one of them is going to say, 'No, that's the way you do it, not the way I do it,' or 'No, I refuse to hit him as hard as you want me to because it's going to hurt him.' Batman will have to learn about these new teammates," Barr says. "Jim Aparo is very concerned, as Len and I are, that this is a Batman book. Jim's cautious about that and sometimes when I asked for Batman to be talking to one of the Outsiders and he's off-panel, Jim will redraw it to put Batman in the scene."

Aparo stated in COMICS SCENE #5 that he wasn't interested in large teams but here he is, a year later, drawing a six member force. "Jim is a real trooper," Barr says with admiration. "He's very open to challenges and likes having his muscles exercised." However, Aparo only does 20 complete pages a month and the comic calls for 23 pages plus a cover. To compensate, Barr expects there sometimes to be shorter stories with back-up tales, spotlighting the new characters, drawn by other artists.

Barr also expresses hope for time to concentrate on characterization. One challenge he looks forward to is bringing Metamorpho, basically a tongue-in-cheek character, into the serious DC universe. He won't leave out the Staggs—Simon and his daughter Saphire—and expects them to pop up within the first year.

As can be seen on this page, Black Lightning is back to hurling thunderbolts. Barr has opted to ignore many of the things done with the character over the last few years and go back to the original character as created by his friend Tony Isabella. Lightning will be hurling biogenetically produced bolts but other than that, will be an athletic fighter.

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WHY WOULD I?
YOUR "TREATMENTS" GAVE CONSIDERABLE ABILITIES TO ME, BUT I'M NOT SURE WHAT TO DO WITH THEM NOW...
AND IT WOULD BE A SHAME TO LET SOME DISCOVERIES GO TO WASTE!
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KOOOOM

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OR WHO TO. REALLY ARE.
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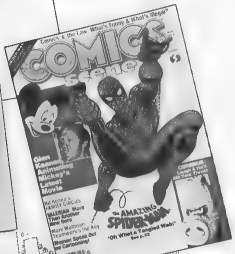

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And so starts DC's newest mini-series, *Sword of the Atom*. The project, premiering in June, was conceived by Gil Kane, shortly after returning to the company in 1982. Kane had originally illustrated the Atom's adventures when he first appeared over 20 years ago.

"Primarily, it is the Atom, moving out of the institutionalized concept of the character as a superhero, into a concept of the Atom as a sort of barbarian prince in a whole new setting," explains Gil Kane. Kane will be plotting and illustrating the four issue mini-series while the dialogue is provided for by Jan Strnad (see page 30).

"He gets lost in the Amazon," Kane continues, "and as the result of an accident, his abilities are lost to him." The permanently six-inch tall Atom wanders through the jungle until he encounters an entire race of six-inch people who, over the centuries, have learned to survive in the hostile environment. It's a savage land but the Atom finds out how easily he fits in.

"At the end, he loses his way out of Shangrila—so to speak—and through a set of circumstances, finds his way to the ordinary world. It's an entire set of experiences that will be lost to him. I think it's strong material that we're using for DC and for the superhero character."

Kane explains that DC wants the Atom returned to normal by the end of the mini-series so they may continue to use him in the standard superhero exploits. However, he says he wouldn't mind returning the Atom to this environment at a later date. To Kane, the mini-series format is perfect for comics. "I think the superhero situations become tiring after a time. They always have the superior ability to surmount their problem. I like the idea of being more human, more vulnerable where they can deal with the problems intelligently. Doing limited stories helps that situation. Rock stars only release an album once or twice a year, not every month.

"The point, I think, is that you can't do people who are essentially cyphers. I think there is too little creativity on the level of the writers and artists and too much control on the level of the publishers. There has to be a constant challenging of the status quo. Look what happens to characters: Conan clearly shows exhaustion as a character."

Kane is doing his bit, he feels, in trying to improve the level of storytelling and artwork used in the newsstand comics. "The characters National [now DC] created 20 years ago fitted into a style of publishing that was not sentimental or an emotional school of writing. They were well thought out puzzles and plots that had to get resolved. That tended to invalidate a lot of the characters and now, we live in such a period of such color and sensory involvement that it seems like another world."

Kane shares editor status with DC vp-executive editor Dick Giordano, a first for DC and for Kane. Giordano has expressed great admiration for the mini-series and with working alongside of Kane. In turn, Kane has great praise for Strnad. "I enjoy working with Strnad. In fact, he is one of the most satisfying guys I've ever worked with." ■

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First Comics

(Continued from page 54)

the world of 2031 A.D. The Martian-born Flagg arrives on Earth after being drafted into the Plexus Rangers, a "sort of national state militia, functioning out of shopping malls scattered throughout the country." The action focuses on Chicago's Plexmall, under constant attack by biker gangs.

"The concept began as a futuristic western, basically a science-fiction version of *Gunsmoke*, if you will. And, it got out of hand. It started developing, characters started popping up. When I announced the strip last summer, I called it a combination of *On the Beach* and *Lil' Abner*, a description which still functions to an extent. It's about politics, television and violence, among other things. I've got an average of 16 or 17 regular characters—mostly women, because I like girls . . . .

"Flagg is highly moral and fairly bright. Many readers will see the feature's first couple pages as another Dominic Fortune. He is not Dominic Fortune, who is a very lucky bubblehead."

Chaykin has the first year tentatively planned out. The first three issues comprise one story, the next three tell another story, and issues seven through 12 make up a major adventure.

"I've set up the scheme of my first 12 issues in #1's first few pages, somewhat obliquely. There will be direct continuity.

"I feel the future is much like the present, only later, and more so. The U.S. population has been grossly reduced by various circumstances, not including nuclear war. The U.S. is functionally a Third World country. The two major world powers are the extremely conservative, capitalistic, and mildly imperialistic Brazilian Union of Americas, and the extremely regimented, highly paranoid leftwing Pan-African League. Read what you will.

"Flagg represents the law, but the law ain't what it's cracked up to be. We haven't got a villain per se, but we'll be playing with politics, urban warfare, gang wars, motorcycle crazies, illegal flying and just maybe—a zeppelin. It's a strip about language, about interpersonal relations, about basketball. It's very costumed—there's a fad where people wear all the clothing they own at the same time, as a show of affluence."

Never known as shy and retiring, Chaykin says he's trying to shake his reputation as a loud mouth, but notes that his liberal politics have been stirred by the Right's current activities.

"As I've gotten older, I've become more of a gentleman. I don't think it's necessary to be a big mouth in public. With *American Flagg*, it's time for me to spit into the wind with the idea that liberals are patriotic, too. It's an American comic book about my attitudes toward America, and it's a hell of an opportunity to play around."

"There will not be any personally directed attacks on any one facet of American life, because I think that's pointless. There will be a definite satiric tone though. It's a very serious strip done in a fairly deadpan humorous style—a very cartoony strip drawn realistically."

Chaykin says he took two years away from comics to work in paperbacks and editorial illustrations, until the Recession struck the publishing industry, and he was drawn to play at First.

"In those two years, the comic industry changed dramatically—they're the only form of publishing at the moment which is doing solid, positive business. The money has increased dramatically, and ownership and rights distribution are very different—Marvel and DC have ceased to have a stranglehold on the industry, with First, Pacific, Eclipse and the other new houses coming in," he adds.

Ghodish notes that the other new publishers are an extremely good omen for First.

"It proves that the marketplace is showing a desire for alternatives. It's a healthy sign. We are all competing for certain dollars, but the market should be big enough for many companies to survive," he says, and notes their royalty plan will hopefully tilt the odds toward First.

"Everyone is talking about creators' rights and royalties, and I think much of that talk has emanated right out of this company," he says, pointing out that First creators own the rights to their properties.

THE RETURN OF E-MAN

Staton is among those who have benefitted—First purchased the rights to *E-Man* and gave them over to Staton, who then assigned half to co-creator Nick Cuti. Although he's working with writer Marty Pasko this time around, Staton says the character has basically remained the same.

"The satire is more pointed and specific. The way Marty's mind works," he says, referring to the recent jabs at Steven Spielberg, *The X-Men*, comic collectors, and Scientology. "Marty likes big targets, where Nick was more generalized. The characters remain pretty much intact, with the addition of the ghost of Albert Einstein."

Staton and Gold say they're developing a talent pool to use as their line expands. Their first discovery, 21-year-old Lenin Delsol, has taken over Mike Grell's *Starslayer*, after drawing back-up strips in *Warp*.

Delsol spent his first 16 years growing up in England. He studied at the American Academy of Art, and cites Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko as early models, with Craig Russell and Moebius as later influences. Gold spotted Delsol's work on the wall of a comic shop and recommended him to Staton. Under Staton's coaching, Delsol says he's improving constantly ("Lenin's actually at the point now where we can be cruel to him," laughs Staton).

"I'm definitely shooting for my own individual style," Delsol admits. "If you set out to imitate somebody, then you'll just draw like him—and how can you ever be better than someone if you're only *taking* from him? I can see some of my own style emerging now, though it's not as much as I want yet."

The question of style leads to an interesting observance: the First Comics house style is, simply, that there is no house style. Gold maintains that their artists, including Chaykin, Staton and George Freeman (who worked on two *Warp Specials*), are individuals who have *never* stylistically fit in at DC and Marvel. He notes that even Grell's style has had no impact on DC beyond *Warlord*, a consistent top seller among fans.

"When you look at a company which attracts and gets so much work out of people like Howie, Joe and George, work which doesn't really fit in anywhere else, you begin to see a sense of image. Not house style, but certainly a sense of image to First Comics," Gold says.

"There are character designs, but they're all interpreted by the artists," explains Patterson. "My house ad of Sargon is different from both the Brunner and Delsol versions. Although it's the same character, it's not exactly the same face—not like John Romita re-touching everybody's heads like they used to do at Marvel."

"There are things in our editorial and writing approach which unify our company," Gold says. "We publish some sexy comic books. Our comics are at least going through their adolescence, whereas, sexually, most comic books—certainly those from Marvel and DC—tend to be in their pre-adolescence at best.

"There's an awful lot of stuff in the *Warp* plays that you've never seen in comics before, that we do not cut. The whole fact that Lord Cumulus' sexual energy is what keeps him a prisoner of Xander in *Warp #5*—I mean, that's a concept just a bit too sophisticated for old Superman or Spider-Man." Though the company operates outside the Comics Code, they hope to walk the line "between undergrounds and wimpettes," with a sense of "what's going to outrage the PTA in Des Moines."

Although First Comics expects to expand its line to at least eight titles in the near future, they won't place any limits on growth.

"We're committed to continuing to expand our line as good material comes in, if it's worth doing," Gold admits. "There's a great deal of good material we declined to publish, and not because it wasn't good enough—some things were either too close to a book we're publishing now, or to something we've had our eye on publishing.

"But, there are some big name talents and some very good material that we just decided we didn't want as part of the First Comics image. We will look at a proposal from anyone, any established person in the

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First look at *American Flagg*, courtesy of Howard Chaykin. The comic debuts in June.

business—although people who are breaking in should write First, because we don't have time to look at all the unsolicited stuff we have now. The only rigid policy we have is that we're not interested in printing elves. Or at least, living elves. We may kill a bunch of them off in *E-Man*. . . ."

First Comics is considering a number of future projects with new packages and formats, including reprinting the original Charlton *E-Man* stories on a better grade of paper as a two or three-volume trade paperback set. Gold says many dealers have asked them for the books, and First will be happy to comply if they have enough similar requests from fans.

"Rather than just go into the comic book market, we might be able to make a publishing deal with a major company and get it into bookstores, too," Obadiah says. "Comic books are the first introduction to fine art for most of America's youth, and there's no reason why our medium can't be expanded into different fields. That's what I've been trying to do all along."

"I think the First Comics organization is attractive," says Joe Staton. "We're not three guys in a basement, and we're not the afterthought of a conglomerate—we're a perfectly rationally-organized business. And our main thrust is comic books, that's what's really attractive. DC committed to merchandising so long ago, that they've forgotten a simple fact: the business of a comic book company *is* comic books."

"As we make money, the profits will be turned back into the company, making it stronger," Rick Obadiah pledges. "First Comics hopes to be around until at least the turn of the century—we will be here, and we'll be the First company to get there."■

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Ed. Notes

I'd like to respond to Jan Strnad's thought-provoking Guest Spot on "Comic Book Morality." Although I agree with his perception of what happened in the '50s (I was around then), I think his attempt to apply the lessons from that period to the present situation is misplaced and that he offers a solution to a problem that really isn't there.

This is *not* the 1950s. Back then, the public outcry was against the alarming rise in "juvenille delinquency." Comics could be pointed to as a contributory factor. Today, the forces of retrenchment and conservatism are concerned about abortion, the death penalty, the growing, vocal gay community and video-game addiction.

Jan states that the result of the Congressional hearings on comics was the creation of the Comics Code. But really, the more important, more influential result was the dissolution of E.C. Comics. This had a more profound effect on the industry than the self-enforced Code. The E.C. books had their share of shocking and disgusting stories, but they were far more than an invitation to nightmare. They contributed to the growth of a uniquely American artform—and were the direct descendants of the adventure and mystery pulps of the '20s and '30s (the ones that my mom and dad read as kids to scare themselves . . . or just have a good time). The pulps were never stamped "For Adults Only," nor were they kept away from minors. Nor, if they delivered, would such a dissignation have kept minors away from them.

But Jan needn't worry about a similar assault on comics today—there are just too many other "threats to decency" to worry about a youngster seeing four-color or black-and-white illustrations of kinky sex and menstruation. And wait till the Rev. Falwell and his followers discover the sins that a bound on *pay TV!* Pay cable stations offer whatever the viewer wants: from X-rated porn to alternative lifestyles. *MTV* is a much more likely candidate for the wrath of the moral majority than *E-Man* or *Twisted Tales.*

I'm totally against ratings systems; they tend to be repressive and they just don't work. Let's take Jan's example of the kid who wants to see *Breakfast of the Living Dead.* His parents check out the rating in the papers and find out that it has an X. They say "no." The child takes it calmly. He goes back to his room and turns on the TV. He picks up the cable guide and browses through it. And, what do you know! *Breakfast of the Living Dead* is being broadcast on HBO *12 times* during the next month, including five showings in the "after school special" time slot. The child puts down the guide, smiles contentedly, and goes back to watching *Road Runner* cartoons, chuckling as the Coyote gets chopped, grilled, diced, sliced, exploded, flayed, spayed, drawn and quartered . . . again and again and again.

And, Jan, you must know that the film industry's ratings don't achieve their desired goal—that is, to prevent a young, impressionable person from being prematurely exposed to certain aspects of life which the ratings board deemed they should not be exposed to before a certain age. There is plenty of sex and violence in PG-rated films. And many R-rated films are stuck with that rating because of a few four-letter words (words common to the lexicons of most 10-12 year olds).

As an impressionable youngster, the three scariest movies that I saw (and from which I had nightmares) were *Pinocchio, Invaders from Mars* and *Psycho.* Of the three, only *Psycho* would have been rated something other than PG. And that film has recently been broadcast on TV, intact, in prime time.

Howard Zimmerman/Editor-in-Chief

To Be Continued...

SUPERMAN III will fly into theaters come June and we bring you our coverage next issue. **Cary Bates,** Superman-scripter supreme, talks about the character in the comics and on the silver screen. Bates also discusses adapting the movie for comics and the perils of trying to keep things consistent.

CHRIS CLAREMONT is about to launch the X-Men on a new path and Diana Schutz cornered him for a revealing two-part conversation. In part one, Claremont discusses the mutant heroes; where they've gone and where he's taking them to next. He also discusses a broad range of topics including his reputation as a "woman's" writer.

DOC SAVAGE, the Man of Bronze, recently celebrated his fiftieth birthday and expert Will Murray brings us a fond look back, starting with the pulps and going right up to his revival via a series of radio plays for National Public Radio. Be on hand for Doc and his band of five very unique aides.

ROMANCE COMICS, are they a thing of the past? It seems lately that many people are talking about reviving the genre in some form or another. We dispatched Alan Breznick to trace back the history of the form, starting with the Simon/Kirby days all the way through their death in the mid '70s. He stopped along the way for comments from Joe Simon, Joe Orlando, Nicola Cuti, Joe Gill and Carol Kalish.

PLUS: Martin Pasko starts a brand new column, Dick Giordano steps into the Guest Spot, Dick Ayers speaks about his career in the comics and we'll have a pictorial preview of Eclipse Enterprises' latest title, *Aztec Ace,* written by Doug Moench.

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